Written In the Stars

THE OFFICIAL TDDK SUN & MOON FANZINE

Cover art provided by @dazed-squid

Table of Contents

Content listed pertains to fics only. Artwork is included in the zine but is not listed.

Masked Hearts 4
the sun to my sky; the moon to my stars .. 15
between their shared skies 27
Orbiting 28
over 1300 kilometers to closure 29
To Taste the Sun 38
Moon Mochi 39
Rowing Dreams 49
faro notturno 49
Bound by Their Eclipse 55
your love affects me in phases 66
Fated Love 68
Selenion 70
Once-in-a-lifetime Discovery 80
Phases of the Stars 91

Mirador: or, a reunion 99
Woodstock, VT 100
Index 103
Special Thanks 106
Back Cover 109

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Masked Hearts

Written by: CrzA

★ ★ ★

The sun rises another day to shine over the kingdom of Endeavor, and with its first light arrives a letter for the King. Shouto sits beside him, disinterested, displeased, as the messenger reads the announcement from the neighbouring kingdom of Yuuei, voice loud and clear and just the tiniest bit grating to his ears. But as he speaks, Shouto slowly raises an eyebrow with interest.

“Our good King of Yuuei, Yagi “All Might” Toshinori, has chosen his successor!” The messenger bellows, his thin moustache bouncing on his lip with each word, blond hair whipping as he gestures wildly to punctuate the sentences. “He invites Your Majesty, King Enji of Endeavor, and all who wish to attend, to a masquerade ball upon the arrival of the full moon after the next, where the boy will be introduced to the masses! Our kingdom is proud to announce that it will be in good hands when the time is right for him to take the crown, and we wish for all to witness his rise to princedom, as has been tradition for all the generations before him!”

At the sound of his father’s ill-concealed scoff, Shouto rolls his eyes, leaning forward with interest as the messenger bows before the court, twirling with a flourish and an invite to all those present. He makes a show of telling everyone that same courtesy will be extended to the townsfolk and his father’s scowl deepens at that, which only makes Shouto like this whole ordeal even more. Frankly, he doesn’t quite care for balls or other such gaudy events, but when they seem to irk his old man so, to claim that it doesn’t make him all the more excited to attend it would be a lie, and he likes to think himself honest, if a little blunt.

It would be a blatant disrespect if his father were to refuse such a public invitation from a kingdom they had recently signed a treaty with, so he knows that they will have to attend, but before he can tell the messenger to consider his message delivered,

Shouto stands. His father glares his way but cannot tell him to sit before he calls for the envoy, who whips right back to him with a toothy grin and another flamboyant bow.

“Our kingdom is honoured for the invitation. Please, make yourself at home for as long as it takes you to inform our people of this joyous occasion. Anyone who wishes to accompany the court will surely welcome the announcement so they may prepare for the journey, and who better to deliver it than the King’s own herald.”

“Right you are, Your Grace!” The messenger bows one last time, a corner of his lip pulled into a lopsided smirk. “Rest assured, my skills will get this marvellous news spread to every corner of Endeavor, or my name is not Yamada Hizashi!”

“Safe travels,” Shouto nods his head, sinking back into his seat as his father grunts out an annoyed send-off with a half-hearted wave of his hand, and the messenger is gone in a blink.

With a deep breath and a huff, his father dismisses the court, stomping out of the room with Shouto in tow, slightly more satisfied with his minor contribution to the King’s displeasure than he should be. Although, given how much he loathes this life on a normal day, he has learned to appreciate the little joys he still finds once in a blue moon.

The preparations for the coming journey start that very same day, his father’s irritation evident in every aggressive order thrown at the poor people who had the misfortune of serving him. Sadly, that includes Shouto as well. As much as his father despises (envies, most like) Yuuei’s customs, he has Shouto learn them all in the span of a few days, wanting to make him out to be the picture of perfection no matter the social context.

He is to stand above every single person attending that masquerade, recognisable by his regal posture even if his face will be covered—his hair and eyes would be more than enough to give him away, Shouto thinks, but he really has no say in any of it. And to make matters worse, he has to listen to his father’s complaints, his self-righteous rants of how the ways of Endeavor are so much more efficient and elegant.

“*Picking* an heir,” His father hisses, and Shouto fails to bite his tongue

“Didn’t you do just that?”

Under his father’s icy glare, Shouto simply glares back, lifting his chin to let the tailor do his job without having to be asked.

“From the *peasantry*.” He continues, scowl deepening as he completely ignores Shouto’s accusation. “Those peasants are not bred to rule. They do not know the meaning of the word.”

“Their kingdom has prospered for many generations. I would say their methods are working perfectly well, father.”

All the answer he gets is a grunt, and for that much, Shouto is grateful, but his patience is thinning by the time his outfit for the ball is complete. It’s awfully lavish, covered in goldthread, intricate embroideries, and gemstone buttons that glint in the light no matter which way he turns. To say that he isn’t fond of the obvious display of wealth would be an understatement, but what makes his features scrunch is the last piece.

A golden mask in the shape of a crescent moon sits snuggly over his nose, secured by a black silk ribbon tied around his head and carefully hidden between his distinctive red and white locks. The side of the mask follows the line of his jaw, ending just a couple of centimetres from the corner of his mouth and covering the entirety of his left cheek.

“A perfect show of craftsmanship.” His father nods, clearly pleased with the result.

A clever way to hide the broken state of my face, you mean, Shouto ponders, staying silent for once.

“I would care to see them try and achieve such beauty.”

Rather than bother with a retort, Shouto merely sighs, twisting on his heel and removing himself from the chamber after tossing the mask onto the nearest armchair. He completely ignores his father’s irate calls, shedding the vest here, the boots there, leaving the expensive clothes throughout the castle’s halls until he reaches his room in nothing but his underclothes. If any of the castle’s workers had been shocked by his state of undress, none of them had dared show it, let alone utter a word.

Sometimes he wished for a reaction, a gasp, a snort, anything that would make him feel less like a thing to be revered and more like a human being allowed to act his age.

With a petulant huff, Shouto throws himself onto his bed, burying his face in the pillows and resisting the urge to scream into them. He just hopes the ball will be a fraction less insufferable than the rest of his life, one single respite from this hellish existence of obeying a man he would rather not see on most occasions.

The only thing getting him through each day seems to be the thought that maybe one day he will make a better king than his father could ever hope to be. Perhaps he could be a ruler like that of Yuuei, respected through honour and hope, not fear and threats.

It might just be an unachievable dream, given who has taught him. But despite that, Shouto wants to believe that he can take his father's less than good example and avoid the mistakes he thinks he has made. One could argue that he would just make even bigger ones, mess things up even further, and Shouto oftentimes lies awake at night with the crushing anxiety of that coming to pass. But if he just resigns to his fate without at least trying to steer it in a different direction, then he can be sure of his failure.

It might be that this trip to Yuuei will inspire him. Watching the benevolent King up close and personal, seeing his methods with his own eyes rather than just reading text off books and scrolls, some of that honour might rub off on him.

His father has his motives for going to the ball, Shouto will hold his own close as well.

When the day finally arrives, many many people's interests alone, but with promises of food, drink, music and laughter, those who can afford the journey are unlikely to turn it down.

Shouto counts it as a blessing that his father ensures there are separate tents for them to spend their nights in throughout the trip, but they are still far too close for comfort. One of the upsides of living in a castle too big for its inhabitants is that when he is not required to be in his father's presence, there are plenty of places in which he can avoid him altogether. Confined in camps crowded with knights, soldiers and servants, there isn't much room for hiding away from people in general.

Arriving at the capital of Yuuei is a much-needed relief, especially considering the milder weather. Endeavor is known for its warm winters and scorching hot summers, so reaching Yuuei and appreciating the soft breezes rustling through the leaves of the lush trees that line the path up to the castle's entrance, Shouto can't help but breathe in the fresh air. The sun's rays caress his cheeks softly, colouring them a soft shade of red as the warmth spreads through him, inviting and comforting rather than suffocating.

It isn't hard to understand why people speak so well of these lands, aside from their King's fame.

When the King himself receives them all at his castle's doors, arms open wide and smile large and bright on his face, Shouto isn't entirely sure whether he should be surprised or not. The stories of the man's hospitality and amicability travelled far and wide, but seeing a King bow to his guests as they climb off their horses... Having lived with the ruthless King of Endeavor, Shouto must admit it is a bit jarring to say the least.

"You must be weary from your travels. Please, allow me to welcome you into my home. My page will show you to your chambers and you may rest until the masquerade ball tomorrow evening. Many others are arriving as we speak, so I must apologise for not accompanying you myself."

Shouto blinks as the stable hands take his white mare by the reins along with his father's red stallion, leading them away from the party with the help of Endeavor's soldiers. A young man with blond hair and beady blue eyes bows before them, smiling affably once he stands once again, hands pressing down the wrinkled lines of his clothes.

"I am Togata Mirio. Please allow me to escort you to your guest wing."

Shouto nods respectfully while his father offers nothing more than a hum of acknowledgement, holding his chin up as he exudes arrogance.

While they walk behind the page, he takes the time to speak of the castle's history, about how it was arduously built by a man to shelter the people when they suffered through a great war that left their country in ruins. It was a whimsical tale of courage and perseverance, of a man with poor health pushing past his shortcomings to protect those who were left after a tragedy, and to carry on this torch of hope throughout the generations. There was no one true King, no bloodline to honour, merely a person who took on a mantle from the one that came before and led a people to prosperity.

It was a rather moving story, Shouto would give them that. Whether it was true or not, he could not know, all kingdoms had their legends, after all. His father made it abundantly clear that he did not find the tale entertaining or believable, but Shouto abstained from giving any sort of opinion whatsoever. If only to avoid his father's temper for now. It wouldn't do to not get to enjoy the ball at least a little because he

decided to voice his thoughts on how his father would be better with his tongue tied every once in a while.

The rest of the day passes by in a blur of baths without salts, light but flavourful meals, and sinking into a much harder mattress than he is used to. He had noticed that the castle had rather simple decorations, nothing too flashy or expensive, just splashes of colour here and there, cheap fabrics, not very eye-catching but sturdy furnishings that certainly did their job just fine.

Shouto thinks he enjoys Yuuei's less lavish tastes, finding some beauty in this simplicity.

Though, the kingdom spared no expense for the reveal ball, it seems. Still, Shouto notes how even the most ostentatious decorations seem to have been lovingly crafted by the very people of the town. He watches as everyone helps decorate, from young children to older citizens, smiling and laughing as they hang banners and drag chairs and tables. The kitchens are bustling with cooks from all around, lovingly rolling pastries, baking bread, brazing meat... There is joy and excitement wherever Shouto sneaks a peek, whispers of wonder around who the King has chosen.

Only the royal advisors, the heir and the King himself are in on this little big secret, and it is almost a contest to figure out who impressed the man who impressed the woman who ruled before him. The only clue is that it is a boy, and the rumours run abound.

Is it the gardener's son? The baker's? Could it be the young page who always follows him around, who the King took in after his mentor met his untimely end? Maybe it is one of the knights?

Shouto can't help but be pulled into the guessing game, searching the corners of the halls as he takes a short walk around the grounds. No one stands out. But perhaps that is the entire point.

Eventually, he has to return to his chambers to get ready for the ball, a handful of maidens ordered to his room to scrub him, brush his hair, and paint what parts of his face will not be covered by the mask. They draw swirls of gold over his right cheek, paint a soft red over his lips, and dust his lids with splashes of silver, popping below the gold of the mask once they help secure it on his face and braid a few locks of his hair with strings of pearls on the left and rubies on the right. Shouto feels like a doll as they work on him, and not in a good way.

It's not that they handle him without care, quite the opposite. Besides, much like him, they can do nothing but obey his father's orders—and they don't even have to luxury to talk back to him from time to time. Really, that is what is most telling, isn't it? In most aspects of his life, Shouto feels like he has no choice, no free will. So, at times such as these, when he is sitting still, handled by so many hands, silent and willing, he feels a lot more like an object than anything else.

Getting up from his seat allows him to breathe, adjusting his cuffs helps his heartrate settle, and feeling the decorations in his hair with the pads of his fingers as he stares at his reflection in the mirror returns him to a sense of reality. He swallows thickly. This feeling won't last long.

Once the celebrations begin, so will his father's parading of riches, of possessions. Shouto is a part of those. He should count the minutes it will take for him to dissociate, for his mind to wander to some distant corner of the universe where he isn't trapped by his blood. Maybe there he can finally be free.

Slowly, he walks to the main hall behind his father, playing with his left cufflink as he looks around and spots the royal guests from other kingdoms. The princes of Ingenium are sporting intricate masks with details that protrude along the sides of their faces, imitating steel swords welded together over their temples. If it weren't for the recognisable red of their eyes with the darkness of their hair, the allusion to their steel and weapon's trading would have been a dead giveaway.

Somewhere on the other side of the great hall, shouting loudly at a young man with bright red hair, a blond barbarian wears a tribal mask, weaved with straw and dried flowers. Must be from the Dragonlands, if the markings on their exposed skin and their fur-lined, hardened leather outfits are anything to go by. The sharp teeth on the redhead certainly stand out whenever he grins at the other's explosive outbursts.

On another corner, he spots the herald who had come to Endeavor chatting with a gruff-looking man with a dishevelled black mane and dark circles so large he can see them from the holes in his panther mask, and beside them stands another about Shouto's age with equally wild hair. His expression is also one of disinterest, his mask similar to the other's but more reminiscent of a domestic cat.

His father all but pushes him towards what looks like the rulers of Creati, their daughter standing between them both, poised and elegant with a beautiful mask with a royal crane's wings framing her eyes. She nods politely at them when they approach, a soft smile tugging at the corners of her lips, but Shouto can see her gaze drifting to the opposite end of the room, to another young woman with a flowing pink dress that makes it seem like she is floating whenever she moves, despite the simple fabric it seems to be made of. Her mask looks equally inexpensive but compliments her features nicely, the pale white accentuating the bright pink of her cheeks.

As his father prattles on about whatever he means to brag about, brushing the crimson and orange feathers that stem from his mask in a mimicry of flames with rough fingers, Shouto, too, finds himself letting his gaze wander. He catalogues the hidden faces, making note of the ones he recognises and the ones he doesn't but that for some reason draw his attention. He only stops his scan when a hush falls over the growing crowd and everyone focuses their eyes on one single point.

"Presenting: Your Majesty, The King of Yuuei, Yagi "All Might" Toshinori!"

The messenger announces at the top of his lungs, and the King humbly lowers his head to the ones present.

He is wearing a simple but polished outfit, gold, red and blue like the colours of his country. The mask is undoubtedly what stands out from what he is wearing, resembling a lion in its shape, especially when paired with the blond mane of the man himself. It's simple yet regal, and it suits both the King and the occasion.

The sound of clapping and pleased comments washes over the room as he descends the steps, greeting those he goes past until he stops by Yamada and slaps a hand on his back, almost knocking him to the floor. A loud laugh bounces off the walls, and with it, those present return to their previous conversations as if nothing had happened at all.

Absently, Shouto thinks of how his father would never allow anyone's eyes to stray from him if he were hosting such an event, and from the exaggerated roll of his eyes and the badly concealed twitch of his lips, he must be thinking the exact same thing. Shouto jolts out of his little world even further when a heavy hand falls over his shoulder and tugs him closer to his father.

Shouto wants nothing more than to shake him off, but there are too many eyes on them. Really, it would serve his father right if he did cause a scene, but his body tenses against his will anyway, a mix of anger and anxiety locking his muscles and freezing him in place with nothing but a subtle shaking to his body as a clue that anything is amiss.

"My Shouto is a fine young man," *Not yours.* "He will make a fine ruler one day." *Not to your standards, if I can help it.* "One could even say he would make a fine husband, too, make strong children of his own."

The princess blinks at them at the implication, paling slightly when her parents make no effort to turn the obvious offer down. Shouto finally manages to step away at least, huffing as he mirrors the girl's expression. She seems to understand this struggle at least in some aspect, of having close to no authority over their life when it comes to decisions such as these.

Shouto is sure they could be friends, given the chance, but when they don't even know each other's names, hearing other people speak of their union as if they aren't even there is more than a little infuriating. While the so-called grown-ups talk amongst themselves, as if in a barely polite contest of 'who's possessions hold most value', the girl sneaks away from her mother's skirts and blends into the dancing mob, leaving with an apologetic yet somewhat encouraging smile.

Shouto sucks in a breath, sweeping the room with his gaze in search of an opening of his own, when suddenly, something tugs at his elbow and pulls him into the crowd. A hand falls on his waist while the other laces with his left, twirling him into a waltz before he has the chance to protest.

Any biting words quickly turn to ash when he is met with large green eyes that seem to shine in the chandelier's light, like polished gems of the highest calibre. They are surrounded by a mask tinged in silvers, rather simple in its design and not covering much more than the bridge of his nose and the apples of his cheeks. From this close, Shouto can see constellations of freckles speckled on his skin, the silver lines in intricate swirls and strokes that ornament the sides. And at the middle of his forehead, the image of the sun shoots its rays in every direction, only slightly covered by a wild mop of verdant curls.

The stranger smiles at him, and with that one gesture alone, Shouto knows the reason for the mask.

“You looked like you needed some help, so my body just moved on its own,” The young man offers as way of explanation, guiding him to the centre of the ballroom and away from his father, each step perfectly timed with the music. “I hope you don’t mind.”

His voice is soft, light, as captivating as the smile still playing at his lips as they keep dancing, Shouto’s feet somewhat unfamiliar with not being the lead yet finding their way easily anyway. It must make for a funny image, a man being led by another at least a head shorter than himself. It will surely give Shouto’s father indigestion if he sees it, and that somehow encourages him to dance just a little closer to the stranger who rescued him.

It would only be right to repay the kind gesture with a simple dance, after all.

Shouto hardly pays attention to his surroundings as he continues the slow waltz, following the other’s lead without question. Whoever he is, he inspires a sense of calm and safety in his movements, holding Shouto firmly but not so hard that he feels like he couldn’t escape. But that is exactly the reason why he doesn’t. They glide across the marbled floors as the music and laughter flow around them, going this way and that, twisting, turning, lost in a dance that is far from perfect yet feels timeless in the small eternity of this moment.

Before he knows it, the stranger rolls away from him with a flourish, the tail of his green coat whipping around with him. And just as Shouto thinks this will be the end of it, the young man doesn’t let his hand go, stringing him along out a side door into the brisk air of the evening. Shouto doesn’t fight him, instead falling into step with him when he finally lets his fingers slip away from his own with a polite bow of his head, giving him the option to turn around should he so wish.

While the day had been warm and pleasant, the night seems to promise a more uncomfortable cold that sneaks between the seams of their outfits without permission. Shouto shudders and the other lets out a sheepish little laugh that blends into the music still spilling from the hall behind them, so melodic is the sound.

“Apologies, I forget that not everyone is used to the indecisive temperatures of Yuuei.” He turns his head to Shouto, shoulders pulling up to frame his ears for a beat. “You could go back inside, where it’s warmer. I like the fresh air, though. Especially in the gardens.”

With that, he pauses by a large rosebush, stroking the petals of a scarlet flower in full bloom. Shouto takes a moment to look around as well, casually rubbing at his arms over his shirt to generate some more heat. Instead of making any further comments on the cold or how he is, indeed, unused to it, Shouto turns to his rescuer.

“Do you happen to have a name?”

“I do.” He says, adding nothing further even as Shouto tilts his head in curiosity. “You give me yours and I might just give you mine.”

“Might? Those odds don’t seem very favourable. Besides, I’m sure you already know who I am.” Shouto mutters the last part, reaching for one of the roses himself.

“Well, even if that were true, which I’m not saying it is… I’d rather get the name from the man himself rather than the fame that precedes him.” Another small pause, a smile. “If it so please him.” He adds as an apparent afterthought, bowing in a way that almost seems like mockery, but not in a malicious sense.

“Todoroki Shouto, Crown Prince of Endeavor.” Shouto ends up saying, and the stranger lets out a huff through his nose that could easily pass as a laugh.

“Is that last part also your name? How curious.”

For some reason, Shouto feels blood crawl up to his cheeks at the jab, turning to another section of the garden with a splutter. “No, that’s just my title.”

“Huh. Funny, I don’t recall you requesting my title and I certainly did not ask for yours.”

Shouto moves to scratch beneath his scar in a nervous tick, only realising halfway through that the mask is in the way and just freezing up awkwardly. Stiffly, he brings his hand back down.

“Sorry, it’s a habit.”

The other grins as he waves a dismissive hand. “That’s okay. I’m Midoriya Izuku, son of the town botanist and a travelling merchant who I haven’t seen almost since birth. Not that you asked for that last part, but I thought it was only fair since you so graciously offered more than just your name.”

Chewing on the inside of his cheek,

Shouto shifts his weight, slightly embarrassed, but when Midoriya laughs again, covering his mouth with one hand, the corners of his lips twitch instinctively. His gaze flickers to Midoriya and he runs his fingers through his hair, trying not to mess up the braids.

“Do you often make fun of royals?” He asks as way of conversation, trying to keep his tone light and playful and hoping that the nervousness doesn’t make it sound like an accusation.

Those green eyes seem to glint in the moonlight, betraying a mischievous spirit. “Only when I get the chance.”

Twisting on his heel, Midoriya gestures with his head for Shouto to follow further into the gardens. He doesn’t wait for him, just starts walking, and Shouto hesitates, fidgeting with one of the buttons on his vest. But then he hears his father’s voice calling from inside the hall, loud and demanding even if not quite shouting just yet, and just like that, he starts towards Midoriya and into the hedges, gravel crunching beneath his boots.

When he catches up again, he finds Midoriya with a journal in hand, scribbling on the parchment as he inspects a particular flower. Where did he even get those from?

As if reading his mind, Midoriya lifts the tail of his coat, revealing a leather pouch strapped to his hip with a few pens sticking out of it. Shouto hums with interest, joining him in his study of the plant.

“Medicinal?”

“Indeed.” Midoriya confirms, tapping a flower with the end of his pen. “Just the leaves though. These pretty little buds are quite poisonous.”

“Is that why you’re here in the castle? To study.”

Inhaling deeply, Midoriya snaps his journal shut, shoving it back into the pouch before facing Shouto once more. “The short answer would be yes.”

“And what would be the long answer?”

The sound of metal clicking against metal starts to invade the relative quiet of the evening and Midoriya perks up, blinking in the direction of the noise and ignoring his question all together. Somewhat of a plea twinkles in his eyes as he extends his hand, and Shouto stares at it for a heartbeat. When he laces their fingers together, Midoriya beams at him, blinding him as if he were staring directly into the sun on a hot afternoon in Endeavor, without a cloud in sight to shield him from its merciless light.

Just as the royal guards step around the hedge, Midoriya leads him around the garden, hiding them behind large vases and old trees as he stifles giggles.

“Are we not supposed to be here?”

Midoriya puts a finger to his lips to hush him as the guards patrol the area, looking around a bush before getting back on his feet and dragging Shouto along. When they are about to round another corner, Midoriya stops suddenly and Shouto bumps right into him with a gasp that has the other turning around to cover his mouth. Shouto’s heart jumps to his throat at their closeness, bodies pressed together as Midoriya pushes him against a stone arch.

Steps echo along with hushed voices, whispers of “Problem child” tickling Shouto’s ears. Did his father sic the guard on him for escaping while he wasn’t looking? It wouldn’t be the first time, but when he lets his gaze fall back to Midoriya’s face, he can see the tension in his jaw and the wrinkles on his forehead as he holds his breath to keep quiet. Narrowing his eyes, Shouto purses his lips underneath Midoriya’s palm.

When the coast appears to be clear, Midoriya removes his hand and returns some of Shouto’s personal space with a muted apology. Humming, Shouto presses the lines on his outfit down.

“Did you really take me to spare me from my father’s smothering presence or were you running from something?”

“Hey!” Midoriya whisper-shouts, a hint of offence bleeding into the interjection as he quietly moves back in the castle’s direction. “I have done nothing wrong.”

“That doesn’t really mean you’re not running.” Shouto points out and if it weren’t for the dim lighting outside, he could have sworn he saw a blush tinging the other’s cheeks.

“Touché.”

Midoriya once again forgoes any form of explanation, crouching near the windows and sliding along the walls. Shouto follows regardless, quiet if only for the fact that if he is found he will have to go back to being his father’s showcase. Sneaking around with a potential delinquent is leagues better, in Shouto’s humble opinion. Besides, he has been pretty nice to him, even with

the jokes at his expense; they aren't exactly mean-spirited anyway.

Sliding a large door open, Midoriya checks for any guards before gesturing for Shouto to come inside. It's a wing of the castle Shouto hadn't gone to in his short time here, despite the King assuring them they could go anywhere. All of the townsfolk did, why wouldn't he extend his esteemed guests the same courtesy?

"Because you never know who is planning your demise." His father had grumbled under his breath, clenching a fist.

Shouto could never decide if it was paranoia or narcissism that made him believe no act of kindness could have no ulterior motive. That sense of self-importance would be his own downfall, Shouto believes, too focused on his views to see the bigger picture. The world could be unfair, and it could be dangerous, that much Shouto knows—in part because of his own life, ironically enough—, but not everyone was an enemy. Not everything was out to get him.

If Shouto plans to be a good ruler, that means he will need good allies as well. No matter how much his father rues the peace treaty with Yuuei and the surrounding kingdoms, the truth is that Endeavor's harvests and economy have improved with it. He should know it first-hand, since he raised taxes because of it.

His old man may want an excuse for war, or he may just want an opportunity to rise above all the other kingdoms, bloody or not, yet Shouto knows Endeavor will suffer for it in the long run. The people will starve, fall ill, and brew in hatred for the ones responsible for their misery.

His train of thought derails when Midoriya flails unexpectedly, splaying his hands against Shouto's chest and pushing him into the nearest room. Shouto is about to protest when he hears voices outside, giggling and snorting as they pass. As Midoriya peeks through the door's open slit, Shouto stares above his head, spotting a group of young girls whispering amongst themselves. He recognises the Princess of Creati and the pink-cheeked maiden she had run off to meet along with a few others, all in their pretty gowns and with their masks pulled to their foreheads.

"You're hiding from the guests too?"

"I just heard movement, can't be too careful." Midoriya explains, quickly swinging the door open and jumping out without any qualms.

Some of the girls startle at his sudden appearance, and Midoriya bows to them with a sheepish smile as Shouto awkwardly steps behind him and gives them a curt nod of his own.

"Ladies. Hope you're enjoying the party."

All their eyes seem to fall on Shouto despite Midoriya addressing them, some eyebrows raising curiously. Shouto feels like he is under scrutiny, especially when he locks gazes with the brunette in the pink dress and a corner of her lip twitches, expression darkening slightly. When she waves at Midoriya with a wink, he feels like he is the butt of some joke between the two.

"Well, nothing of interest here. Shall we keep going?" She suggests in a lilting tone, and the others nod and hum, some hiding smiles behind fans or hands. "Good to see you this fine evening, Deku-kun."

Midoriya lets out an exaggerated sigh, already turning back around before Shouto has the chance to make sense of anything. He looks between the retreating group and Midoriya's back in a moment of stunned silence, until his thoughts resume and he once again tails his impromptu guide.

"What was that?"

"A friend." He offers cryptically. "Who apparently made some new friends."

"Do you ever give straight answers?" Shouto asks, pursing his lips, and Midoriya chews on his bottom one.

"Sometimes."

Rather than argue, Shouto rolls his eyes, deciding to drop the matter entirely since there clearly is no point. "Care to at least tell me where we're going?"

"Wherever the wind takes us!" Midoriya exclaims, throwing his arms open then quickly recoiling with a curse under his breath when he realises he may have been too loud. "Or I guess, wherever whoever didn't hear that, isn't."

"I feel so enlightened." Sarcasm drips from Shouto's words, but he really can't help the bubble of amusement bursting in his chest at Midoriya's bashful chuckle, picking up his pace.

"Actually, you might just be, if we get to where I want to go."

"Is that a hint?" Midoriya huffs out an excited breath, and Shouto hums. "The library."

"Ah-hah! You do have some wits to you!" Leaning closer, Midoriya whispers, secretive. "Rumour has it that

future," another flip, "and here is where that heir will write about the next. And the next." He pauses for a moment, sighing wistfully. "Do you know why Yuuei chooses their successors this way, rather than depend on a royal bloodline?"

Shouto had read something about this while he studied their country's traditions. "A leader is not born. They rise from what is passed down by those who came before, taking what they have learned in times of darkness, and marching towards a brighter future."

"Right you are. You really did do your research." Midoriya smiles, inhaling through his nose and leaning against the back of his chair as he crosses his arms over his chest. "Not just that though. Only the people who have lived among the people know what they go through, not those who live in the luxury of a castle for their whole lives, with their every need met. The rulers of Yuuei come from nothing, and they fight for the good of the many that they were surrounded by through a large portion of their life. They care for their own, so they will rule for them, protect them."

Something seems to shine in his eyes then, as he stares up at the ceiling unseeing, lips slightly parted as a sharp breath slips past them. A hint of anxiety ghosts past his features and he trembles, a gesture so minute, so subtle, that Shouto would have missed it if not for the way his curls shake like leaves in a gentle breeze. It's almost as if a cloud hangs above him, threatening a storm that only he can see, and that look is so familiar that Shouto feels his own stomach twist in reaction.

Midoriya had been so talkative and energetic throughout the entire night that Shouto finds this heavy silence uncharacteristic despite never having met him before. Twisting his body to better face Midoriya, Shouto flinches at the loud drag of the chair shattering the quiet moment into a million pieces. Midoriya snaps his head toward him with a gasp, staring at him with big doe eyes as he seems to return from whatever little world he had been lost in.

"Is everything all right?" Shouto asks, voice small and tentative.

"Ah..." Midoriya breathes, somewhat sheepish as he slouches a little. "Yes, I just... I got caught up thinking about how I'm scared of going back out there."

"How come?"

"People have expectations, as I'm sure you're aware." Midoriya scratches at the back of his head with a little laugh that sounds just a bit bitter. "All this running we did tonight, I have been doing my last of it. I won't be able to run anymore, hide and blend with the background. I'm glad I got to do it with you, at least."

Shouto bites on the inside of his cheek at that, a cold feeling pooling at his gut from how much it reminds him of his own life. The guards that had been after him... Shouto wonders what it might be that made him run from them, that is making him want to hide at all.

"You seemed pretty confident the whole time you were dragging me around though." Shouto says instead, trying to lighten the conversation again.

Letting out a shaky sigh, Midoriya hums. "It's easy to pretend behind a mask." Reaching for the corners of his mouth with his fingers, Midoriya pushes his lips into a smile, eyes closed and a couple stray tears shining at the corners. "If you smile and put others at ease, they won't notice how scared you are inside. A good leader knows how to put on a mask for those who follow them, when it's necessary."

Breath hitching, Shouto opens his mouth to say something, not entirely sure what it is, but the sound of the large doors pushing open draws his attention away and burns all his thoughts to ash. The man with the panther mask that had been with Yamada and the King glares at them from the library's entrance and Midoriya jumps to his feet with a defeated little noise.

"Wah, I guess I've been caught."

"The announcement will be made shortly. All guests attending the ceremony are expected at the main hall." The man eyes Shouto as he says that, then turns back to Midoriya. "And that is especially true for problem children under my tutelage."

"I know, I know. We will have to finish our conversation another time. Soon, I hope." Midoriya bows his head apologetically, quickly returning the book to its shelf before waving at Shouto and walking to the man's side without another word.

Once they are gone from view, Shouto takes a moment to gather the courage to return himself, wondering for a second if he can't just stay here until his old man finds him. Yet after giving it the least bit of thought, that will only stoke his

Endeavoreans lack in the intellectual department." Shouto's eyes widen before he glares at him and he lifts up his hands defensively. "I never said I believed it. You seemed very educated to me, respectful of our traditions even though no one here required you to even know them. You left a gold coin at the banquet table when you took a tart before the celebrations even started. Not everyone knows it's customary to leave a gift for the servers and they certainly don't leave such a hefty one."

"Y-you've been watching me?"

"I didn't mean to." Midoriya admits, voice wavering with a hint of shame. "I just happened to be about the castle while you were and... well, I notice things. It is somewhat of a skill of mine, though some may call it an annoyance instead. I like to observe, analyse."

Shouto nods, rubbing at the back of his neck with a shrug. "I suppose that would make sense for a botanist. Details are important."

Midoriya gives him a shaky smile at that. "Yes, I suppose that's true." Pointing towards a large door up ahead, he breathes in and leads Shouto the rest of the way. "Our destination awaits us."

The doors creak loudly as Midoriya pushes them open, and they both flinch at the noise, quickly stepping inside and closing them with a sound more akin to a beast closing its maw than anything else. Shouto takes a deep breath when no one follows, and he slumps against the door with a relieved sigh. The scent of old books invades his lungs and Shouto feels some of the tension leave his shoulders as well, the familiarity of one of his safest places weaving into his soul.

There were always books that he could use as an escape whenever he found the time outside his relentless studies, memories of times long lost where his mother would read to him in a kind and soft voice stirring from the confines of his subconscious. Compared to his father's library, this collection is much more modest, though not at all unimpressive, and Shouto can't help but brush his fingers over the spines on the nearest shelf as he walks further inside, following Midoriya's quiet footsteps.

"So, what are we doing here, exactly?" Shouto eventually asks, watching his companion in this small adventure pick one large tome from what seems to be the section dedicated to historical records.

"Nothing in particular. Just passing the time undisturbed before we're found."

"For some reason, I expected some grand revelation at the end of this journey following you blindly." Shouto quips.

With a light laugh that fills the room, Midoriya carefully places the book on a table, opening it at where it is marked and sitting on a creaky chair. He then turns to Shouto with an inviting smile, a subtle crinkle to his eyes barely noticeable with the mask still hiding part of his expression, and he finds himself staring into them, watching the way they catch the light from above and shine like emeralds in the sun. It's only when Midoriya tilts his head with an inquisitive hum that he realises how long he has just been standing there gawking, jerking back to reality and clearing his throat as he sits beside him, legs crossed and chin held up.

The position is much too formal, Shouto feels, in this relaxed context as Midoriya starts leafing through the book with one hand while he props his head up with the other without sparing him another glance, but he really can't help it. His father made very sure that looking self-important is his default despite it not really being how he feels most of the time. All that matters to him is how Shouto carries himself. He could be having a meltdown, for all he cared, so long as he still looked like the picture of perfection in his blank-faced posture.

Though when Midoriya scoots a little closer, dragging the book with him so that it sits between them, he startles into a slouch, blinking stupidly at him when he points to a page with a portrait of King Toshinori and a few words below it in elegant yet somehow boxy handwriting.

"Queen Nana wrote this herself, after King Toshinori was chosen as her successor. She didn't draw the picture though; I hear she was a terrible artist."

With a short chuckle that Shouto can't help but parrot, he then flips to the next page, still blank but for the mention that this shall be the ninth successor to ascend to the throne. This kingdom is still a young one, all things considered, but it is rich with history, it seems. Shouto leans forward for a better look, humming with interest as Midoriya continues to speak.

"This is where the next record will go, and King Toshinori will be writing about him sometime in the near

anger, and he would rather avoid his temper getting worse than it probably is already. Besides, if he is lucky, he might even find Midoriya again and ask him what he meant by not being able to run any longer.

In such a short time, Midoriya has managed to leave a lasting impression on him, it seems. Such a complex character, appearing carefree and playful, yet showing so much vulnerability in a single moment of honesty shared between them. He knows a thing or two about putting on a face that does not reflect the extent of his emotions. Absently, he reaches for the mask over his left cheek, tracing the edge of the scar hidden underneath from memory.

With a short sigh, Shouto drags his feet to the door, pulling it closed behind him and looking around at the empty halls ahead. His steps echo around him as he makes his way to the main hall, passing by a gossiping couple seemingly vibrating with excitement at the announcement to come. Part of Shouto is curious as well; how could he not be? But his mind keeps drifting back to Midoriya in those last moments, the apprehension in his gaze as he faced the man who had come to get him.

Much like Shouto does now, marching towards where his father will surely be, ready to give him an earful about his absence, Midoriya held a subtle hesitation in his step, each one taken carefully and with great effort, as if he was carrying an invisible weight atop his shoulders. The more he thinks about it, the more Shouto is certain that they have a lot more in common than he may have believed from their short time together.

Music grows louder, gently pulling Shouto back to reality, and he focuses on the path ahead, large doors open in an unwanted invitation into the large crowd gathering to hear the news they have all been waiting for. His name rings loudly in his ears the moment he crosses the threshold, ice-blue eyes glaring at him as his father stomps his way, scowling. His rant about the embarrassment he put him through cuts short when the shrill sound of trumpets demands everyone else's silence, everything grinding to a halt until the hall falls quiet once more.

Not unlike before, it seems not one single person present can help but direct their eyes to the King, this time standing tall from a balcony at the very end that leads into it from the throne room. Curtains dyed in a rich crimson hang from the doorway behind him, hiding whatever—or whoever—lies on the other side, while offering the King a backdrop of glory all at the same time. For as simple as Yuuei claims to be, they sure have a flare for the dramatic, and considering Endeavor's penchant for ostentatious displays of decadence, Shouto would know a spectacle being put on for an audience when he sees it. Even so, it is undoubtedly more tasteful than what he is used to, still captivating and hypnotising, catching the attention of every soul in the room and leaving them hungry for more, but not nearly as hedonistic.

King Toshinori smiles at those present, blue eyes piercing, though not how Shouto's father's tend to be. They are warm and inviting, shining with a kindness and a care for his people that would be more at home on a man looking to his family. But isn't that what gives the rulers of Yuuei their reputation? The kingdom's people are not their subjects. They are their brothers and sisters, their brethren.

No family is without its black sheep, it's true, but what makes Yuuei stand out, is that even to those who have strayed from the righteous path, they will always extend a hand before drawing a sword.

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The moon shines bright through the skylight above the King's head, as if gracing him with her light, bearing witness to this momentous occasion and offering her blessings. When he opens his mouth, Shouto can't help but suck in a breath and hold it, feeling everyone around him do the same.

"My dearest guests," The King begins, his voice travelling through the room and filling the overbearing silence with such reverence the tension all but dissipates, leaving only the anticipation that raises a swarm of butterflies within Shouto's chest. "Some of you have lived here all your lives, while others have come from far and wide at my invitation, and I am most grateful that you have made it all this way to make this ceremony so much more meaningful.

"Tonight the gods have blessed us with clear skies, watching along with us all from their place among the stars as a boy becomes a prince, taking his first step into a future as the King of Yuuei, one who I have no doubt will continue to uphold this era of peace and hope.

"This young man has lived through hardship, as many of you here may have, perhaps still do, and despite his circumstances, his heart has remained true, reaching out with a helping hand to those in need to lift them up no matter how low he may have been. Many of those present may know him already, may even call him your friend, your hero. And it is with my utmost pleasure that I have chosen him to one day be your king."

With his kind smile shining ever brighter, King Toshinori steps aside, gesturing towards the curtains as two guards pull them open from the other side.

Shouto feels the breath knock out of him at the sight of dark curls falling over a silver mask allusive to the sun, eyes like precious emeralds catching the light as he steps into it. With his right hand placed over his heart, the heir to the throne of Yuuei bows deeply, left arm curling around his waist in the downward swing then falling to his side when he straightens once more. Slowly, he reaches behind his head, untying the mask and pulling it off with his right hand, once again placing it over his heart as he shakes stray locks away from his features, facing everyone as himself and not another stranger blended with the crowd.

Unobscured by the mask, his eyes seem somewhat bigger, holding a soft yet steely gaze, determination woven with a kindness unlike anything Shouto has ever had the pleasure to get acquainted with. For what it's worth, he looks like what all the books say a King of Yuuei should be.

His head tilts and his lips curve upwards as he beams down at his audience with a confidence Shouto now knows he doesn't really feel, noticing the subtle sheen to his viridian eyes, listening to the barely noticeable tremble of his voice as he speaks one simple line.

"I, Midoriya Izuku, offer my life to Yuuei and my heart to its people."

"May your life be long, and your heart be true." The King bows his head respectfully, echoed by the many Yuueians around Shouto, voices joined in one unspoken promise sealed with words laced with emotion.

Midoriya's eyes meet Shouto's for little more than a second, but he swears that time itself stops for that one moment, stretching into infinity as every puzzling piece clicks neatly into place and leaves him speechless, breathless. There is a promise in that look too, Shouto thinks, the weight of it dropping on his shoulders and threatening to bring him down to his knees.

The guests erupt in applause and cheers on some of the younger's parts, shattering the moment once and for all as Midoriya sweeps the hall with his gaze, his posture not quite one of a leader as he waves somewhat awkwardly in return, a blush colouring his cheeks. He is still young, just as Shouto is, and he is now charged with the future of a nation along with his own. It's not even a fate he was born into, one that he confessed to being scared to take, and yet he has still risen to take on the mantle thrust upon him.

Were he in his shoes, Shouto can't really say he would have done the same, which, perhaps, is exactly why he finds himself admiring him so much, as well as those who ruled Yuuei in the past. His father can say what he wants about their tradition, but someone who willingly takes on the responsibility to rule when chosen to do so is much more admirable than someone who simply fell into the title of royalty. A King is only as strong as his people, and the Kings of Yuuei are the people of Yuuei.

"With a face like that, it's obvious he is not fit to rule." His father mutters under his breath, and Shouto clenches his jaw.

“I disagree.”

“Then you are just as naïve as everyone in this gods forsaken country. Just like that sorry excuse for a King who chose him.”

Without another word, his father turns his back to him, leaving the hall and Shouto behind. Midoriya and the King duck out of the room as well, the celebrations resuming with renewed vigour, while Shouto debates whether to call it a night himself. Though there is something keeping him there, his eyes travelling from one end of the hall to another and seeing the people’s reactions, joyous laughs and wistful sighs among some of the younger women, conspiring whispers and respectful nods among many others. The music comes back with a vengeance as well, drawing those who still have the energy or those who have had theirs replenished by the news to the dancefloor to commemorate.

In truth, he is searching for one face, and he knows it.

“Looking for someone?” A soft voice whispers in his ear, and Shouto whips around with a gasp, stumbling backwards at the sight of mirthful pools of jade surrounded by tanned skin with constellations of freckles, no mask to hide most of them away any longer.

“How did you—”

“—get here so fast?” Midoriya completes, holding a finger to his lips in a hushing motion, much like he had done before, what feels like impossibly long ago despite the little time they have known each other. “A prince has his secrets, wouldn’t you say?”

“Like even being one at all?” Shouto says, half-joking, but the corners of his mouth twitch all the same.

“In my defence, I technically wasn’t one yet.” Midoriya shrugs, sighing. “I still don’t quite feel like it, if I’m honest.” Shouto hums, blinking when Midoriya offers him his hand without warning, startling him into taking a step backwards. “What say you we start a relationship tonight?”

In his chest, Shouto’s heart skips a beat at the provocative offer, and his mouth hangs open as he stares at a loss for words of his own, tongue useless and heavy as a lump of lead. Hesitantly, Shouto takes Midoriya’s hand, swallowing nervously when he flashes him a pleased little smile that is far too breath-taking to be fair. He tugs Shouto towards him, leaning so close that their breaths mingle between them, and for a moment of pure insanity, he thinks Midoriya might close that minute distance.

“Between our kingdoms, of course.” He clarifies instead, pulling back with a chuckle when Shouto splutters. “You didn’t think something else, did you?”

“Of course not.” Shouto mumbles, indignant, and Midoriya gestures to the dancefloor with his head.

“May I have another dance? I feel like our earlier one was not only too short, I don’t think it counted, considering I didn’t formally ask for it.”

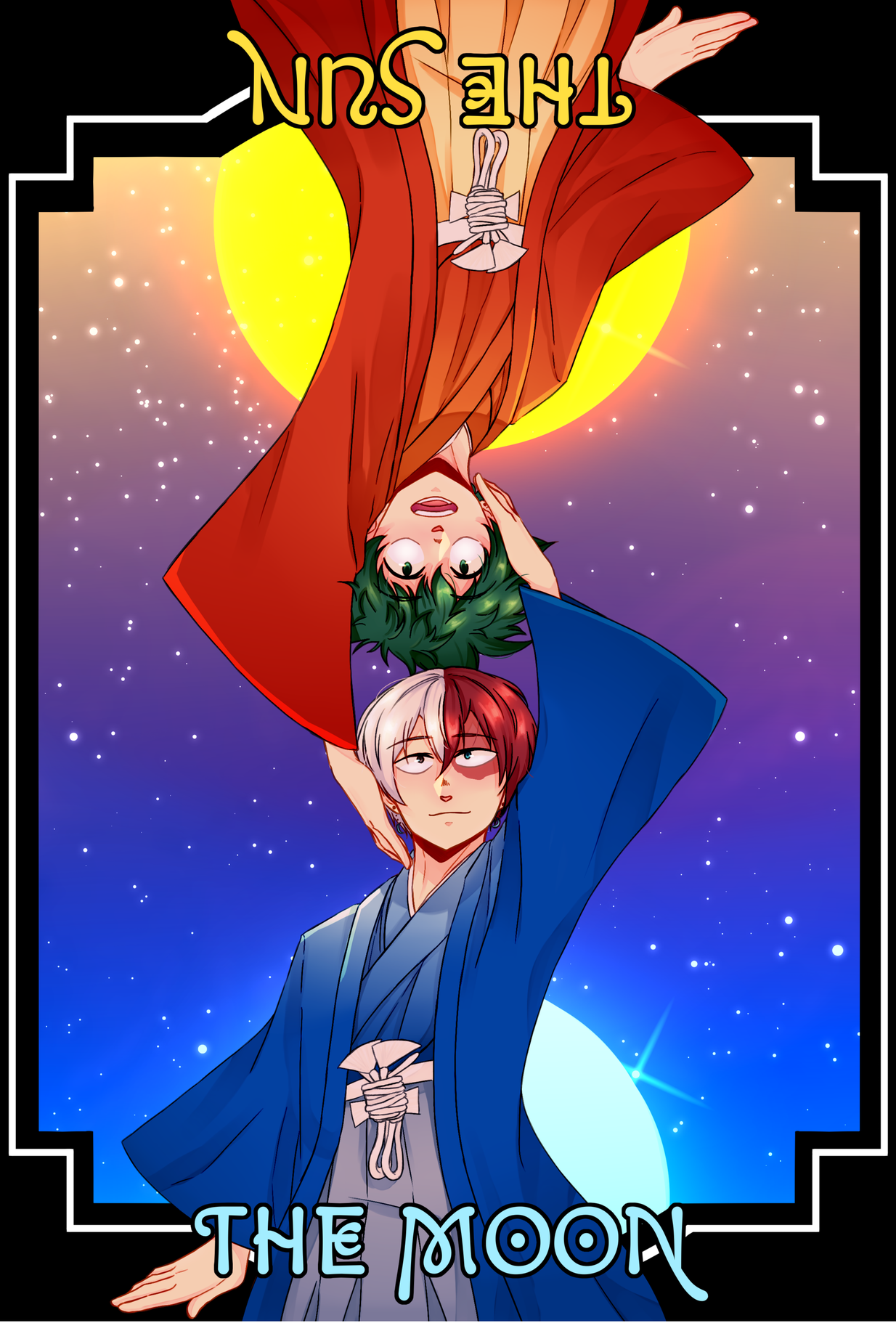
Rather than give him an answer, Shouto simply walks to the dancefloor himself, dragging Midoriya along then twirling him into his arms when they reach their destination, his left hand resting over the other’s waist.

“I get to lead this time.” Shouto says, a short laugh shaking Midoriya’s shoulders in response.

“Sure. I’ll be doing more than enough of it for a lifetime, anyway.”

“And I am certain you will do it well.”

The music blends into the background as they begin to move to the music along with everyone else. As they get lost in the repetitiveness of the steps, Midoriya’s hand slotted comfortably in Shouto’s, he lets his mind drift towards the future, knowing that, regardless of his father’s plans for Endeavor and for him, Midoriya will undoubtedly be a part of it. If he wants to achieve his goals, Shouto is as certain as the sun rising in the east and setting in the west that he must.



Credit to @mysteriousstrumpet

the sun to my sky; the moon to my stars

Written by: smallmightysmash

★ ★ ★

There's something inherently attractive about Midoriya Izuku.

It's not just his wide, bright smiles, the ones that envelop Shouto whole and make him feel as if he's basking in the tender summer warmth; nor is it the refreshing, lively shade of green the boy brings to the world with his hair, his emotive eyes, his caring Quirk. It's not the glimmer in his eyes that erupts into sunlight when he laughs, nor can it be attributed to that immense, overflowing passion that translates into something different and beautiful every time it emerges; a hand outstretched in the darkness.

Shouto thinks Midoriya Izuku is the sun. Burning, bright, beautiful. Untouchable as the sun but somehow, unfailingly human at the same time. Because when Midoriya Izuku bleeds, it's crimson red blood, not sunlight; yet even when he mangles himself beyond recognition, he still burns fierce and bright, and to Shouto, he is the sun- a forgiving ray of light in the darkness; the warmth he so craved after his darkest days.

Midoriya Izuku is the sun and Shouto is his moon, in a distant orbit yet unfathomably close at once. Never able to quite catch the same friendly, free warmth; only able to reflect it whenever he's near the boy, and ponder the enormity of his heart.

Midoriya Izuku is the sun and Shouto is his moon, in a distant orbit yet unfathomably close at once. Never able to quite catch the same friendly, free warmth; only able to reflect it whenever he's near the boy, and ponder the enormity of his heart.

He's not sure when he first noticed the boy. Those first few days of Yuuei, he'd simply known of his existence; seen his oddly meek

behaviour stand at odds with that immensely strong Quirk of his. Looking back, Midoriya Izuku was dimmer, then, burning less brightly and with less unrestrained determination. He'd been shyer, straying away from contact. Maybe that's when he'd first taken notice of him; shy and meek and flinching; an odd reflection of himself.

Truthfully, Shouto never intended on becoming distracted by the boy. Not at first. Powerful Quirks are common. Quirks that harm their users, less so, but Midoriya wasn't the only person in Class 1-A with such a power. So he's not sure why his eyes wander over to Midoriya, almost as if on a long-forgotten instinct.

Shouto isn't sure why his attention keeps falling onto Midoriya, time and time over.

And then the USJ is attacked.

It's an unwelcome reality. No amount of training, no amount of having instincts beaten into his bones, no amount of practise over controlling his Quirk could have prepared Shouto for how rattled he would be, seeing dozens, if not hundreds of people emerge into a once-safe haven with the sole purpose of harming others.

That is the job of a hero: to defeat those who would use their Quirks to hurt others, and to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Shouto is *very* familiar with the rigid definition. It's not written into his blood — heroism can't have been born into his blood, not when his father is the very representation of using one's power to harm others, not when his father is a hero in words but a villain in heart— but it has been carved into his bones, into his mind, every day since his power manifested.

No amount of training can match experience.

And thus, the world moves forward accordingly. Several things become clearer as Shouto's head becomes foggier with mist and the ice weighing down his body. The majority are goons. Shouto doesn't have to think twice about letting some of his cold rage seep out into glacial masses of ice that swallow up the ground with ease. They're dispatched by the dozen, leaving momentary and unimpressed impressions in Shouto's mind, and the distinct knowledge that there is something wrong with this whole attack.

It's a practised art, ignoring the distorted, pale reflection of himself in the ice as he presses toward the central plaza. Goons or not, these people— nothing in power or skill when compared to Endeavour— are still villains, and not all of his classmates have had the pleasure of having self-defense and precise Quirk control beaten into them over the years. Thus, it is his responsibility as a hero-in-training and as a decent human being to get into the thick of this fight, to even the odds out.

Those are the thoughts of a naive child. Or perhaps Shouto had drawn his walls up too high to see past them, and into the reality of hero society— too confident in his abilities to see how low people can sink.

No matter how strong you may be in comparison to others, there will always be someone ready to take a sledgehammer to your certainty in your strength.

Watching the... it can't be called a man, it is not a man, no man should be able to stand with his brain exposed— and even in a world full of increasingly bizarre and fantastical Quirks, nobody should so strongly resemble a walking corpse, puppeted by some unnatural, twisted forces that Shouto can't see. The sight alone pulls heavily at Shouto's gut, the inherent wrongness of its garbled wails piercing into him like bullets—

And before he can blink, let alone move to defend or intercept, Shouto watches the monster crush his teacher's head into concrete.

The world stops. And it narrows down to a very select handful of happenings.

His lungs have constricted, or the air has thinned impossibly; there's no way to tell aside from the feeling of suffocation haunting him. And the blood- when the creature lifts its too-large, grotesque hand from Aizawa's head, the man twitches but doesn't rouse, blood pooling from under him with frightening speed.

Shouto isn't used to uncertainty in himself. But he knows, like a mouse knows it is prey to a cat, that his ice couldn't so much as put a scratch on this monster. Against such a...

Shouto isn't even sure that All Might himself could win.

And if All Might is struggling, what chance does Shouto stand? Unsure and unwilling to put himself into danger unnecessarily— because Shouto isn't an idiot, and if he jumps in now, at his level, he'll just die for nothing. Only a reckless, brash-

Midoriya swings a fist at the creature, a last ditch defence for Asui and Mineta; pitching himself into the thick of it with fervent

desperation, an unfathomable hope painted across his face and it isn't an expression Shouto had ever imagined on anyone other than...

And there's a split second of calm, the lull, where Midoriya's arm is being crushed by the monster's grip and fear briefly shakes his attempt at a reassuring smile for Asui— a second where a flare of concern heady enough to make Shouto stagger heats up his entire being— but it only lasts a fraction of a second before the front doors of the USJ fly off their hinges, and an echoing rumble like thunder thoroughly shatters the faux-peace. Shouto's earlier thought rolls to completion at the sight of the hulking figure shadowed by the sunlight at his back.

All Might has never been so utterly reassuring to see.

All at once, Shouto's breath is pulled from his lungs. Relief, fear, he can't distinguish the cause among the maelstrom of unnamable emotions surging through him, but there's definitely something there.

Shouto tentatively decides, after watching the legendary hero sweep Aizawa and Asui and Mineta and Midoriya away from the focal point of the fight, it's a relief. It's relief that escapes his lungs like water vapour with every breath as shockwaves of pure air pressure push him backward.

Relief that dies bitter on his tongue. All Might, for all his strength— for all his insurmountable power, and for all the strength his father has ruined lives pursuing— falters. His attacks don't put so much as a scratch onto the monster, Noumu, as the hand villain calls it, because of its multiple quirks. An impossible feat that only further proves that there's something sickening about it.

So he doesn't feel bad when he deep-freezes the creature enough to loosen its grip on All Might. Each step forward aches like gravity is increasing on him, driving the icy needles of fear further into his chest. There are other people here. Kirishima. Hardening Quirk. Bakugou. Explosive. Midoriya. Glass canon.

Time rushes by so quickly, Shouto only notices a few key details. Bakugou and Kirishima subduing the warp villain. Midoriya's oddly frenetic demeanour— his nervous gaze resting solely on All Might, as if he's privy to knowledge nobody else is.

Shouto's eyes narrow. The fleeting stalemate lasts for all of a second before the fight explodes back into sparse sensations, a rush of cold air— the rising heat in Shouto's body from restraining his fire from emerging in self-defence— an explosion. And...

...for a too-long second, Shouto finds himself thinking, almost hysterically, that he'll have the front row seat his father always wanted to witness All Might's defeat.

Except.

Except despite the insurmountable odds, despite the overwhelmingly bitter taste of failure, mixing dangerously with the acrid bile in the back of his throat— despite what feels like the world towering against them, looming and oppressive and deadly, Shouto is left to watch, frost-bound, as Midoriya Izuku launches himself into the fray, burning with impossible determination, compassion— casting aside the meek exterior he usually wears like the day casts off the night, and standing proud as a growing ember in the dark.

Shouto can't help but to watch more closely. Perhaps there's more to Midoriya Izuku than his too-powerful Quirk— there has to be, because despite only being a few days into knowing each other, half of the class is beginning to fall into orbit around him. And there's only one other person Shouto knows who can do *All Might?*

Despite his burgeoning curiosity, he won't get close to Midoriya. Even though turning away from him feels like turning his back on the sun.

No matter his attempts to prove otherwise, anger has always run through Shouto's veins with all the fire he's struggled to deny since his Quirk manifested and burned his childhood to the ground. Frustration and pain have always acted like this, pressed firmly against his finer control with all the ferocity of molten lava.

He hates it.

Feeling the press of his repressed Quirk forces Shouto on edge most days because he made a promise to himself, and to the memories of his mother before everything went wrong, that he would never use that power again. He hates that he burns, that half of him instinctively lashes out and thrives on the tinder of a good challenge; that half of him won't be extinguished, and that he can't escape the shackles locked onto him by his blood. The constant reminder of his blood ties to that monster does little for his boiling temper.

Perhaps that is why he's so quick to throw down the gauntlet between

him and Midoriya.

Since USJ, one thing has become irrevocably clear to Shouto— that All Might treats Midoriya differently, supports him more strongly like how the dawn supports the rising sun. A distant part of his heart knows this connection to be out of sight and far deeper than Shouto can comprehend right now, but it strikes an exposed nerve in his chest with pinpoint precision.

There's no way to ignore the glaring opportunity to prove himself in the festival, to beat away the urge to use his flames and prove he can stand proud on his own legs, with his mother's Quirk *only*. Timid as he is, Midoriya shrinks away from the challenge initially— but Shouto isn't blind, he is patient and he is collected and he is the type to study his opponents in detail, and there is steel in Midoriya's green eyes, unbreakable determination shining bright and strong as ever.

No amount of ice can smother Midoriya's determination. It's a perturbing thought, that the other boy had dug up a minefield and blown himself up all in the pursuit of victory— or, Shouto reflects as those green eyes scan the crowds intently, maybe it had been to prove his worth to someone out there.

Briefly, the aimless anger in him flickers, dwindles. *We're the same?*

Shouto's gaze falters at the sight of his father's silhouette in the crowd, those obnoxious flames, and his anger grows higher, more intense. Shouto has to rely on the strained impassivity of his expression— stoic as the moon on a clear night— to fasten the lid on his anger. It doesn't fade, not even a bit. Perhaps in another time, with less of a red haze fogging his mind, Shouto might have distanced himself, kept his temper from being riled up so easily.

The cavalry battle is a quick match, a done deal. In theory, it's a simple feat, freezing the ground, and snagging the headband. Except it isn't, of course, because Midoriya doesn't follow the plans Shouto lays out, his stupidly defiant nature keeps him from being predictable— he's too bright for Shouto to stare at for too long without the risk of losing his focus— and all that anticipation rises up at once in the vibrant, flickering of flames on his arm, like the tentative emergence of a butterfly from its cocoon.

They win the cavalry battle, but Shouto is at a loss.

It's grudgingly that he admits to himself, quiet and ashamed, that Midoriya is bright with his passion, *too* bright— so bright that Shouto lost sight of the unspoken promise rooted into his heart and of his goal; so caught up in that challenge and the thrill of the competition that he stopped being *Todoroki*, and started being *Shouto* for the first time in a *long* while.

Shouto is angry about that too, the risk of betraying the promise that laid the foundation for the decade-old mask he shows to the world.

Quiet, seething with icy rage, Shouto grits out his sordid history, the ambition that directly lead to his very existence, and hopes some of the malice oozing from his sharp tones can extinguish the confusion, the hurt in Midoriya's eyes— because it's almost familiar in its softness, and Shouto's facade seems to be eroding only more rapidly under the brunt of it.

The one-on-one match can't arrive fast enough. The wind is cold, biting, and Shouto can feel his heart pounding in his chest as he glares down at Midoriya.

And the world explodes into motion, into flurries of discarded ice and blasts of ridiculous air pressure. It's odd, in a distanced and morbid way, watching Midoriya's frown shift into a grimace, watching the worry in his eyes shift forms to anger and determination all over again— and there's no forgetting how far he's going, breaking every finger, then his arm, and then returning to those obscenely powerful blasts of air pressure again. The pain of those injuries must be unbearable, Shouto thinks, and then Midoriya goes off again, shattering his fingers twice-over to continue the fight when, for his own safety, retreat would likely be the safest option.

There's no helping it; Shouto buries a growl under his next wave of ice, and the flames of his anger burn ever brighter as the frost coating his body renders the motions sluggish. This riled up, Shouto feels more like an obscured reflection of himself in uneasy, turbulent waters, than he does a living being.

"It's your Quirk! Yours, not his!"

Those screamed words, alight in fury and desperation, strike Shouto's wavering heart— as the world he'd tried cutting himself away from comes rushing back all at once in a blur of sensation, of old memories and fondness, and the fire he's spent so long holding at bay slips from between his fingers in a single, earth-shattering moment.

Shouto's fire burns brightly, but not as brightly as the sun, and nowhere near as brightly as Midoriya, the battered boy in front of him who has the courage— or maybe he really is crazy— to stare down a maelstrom of his own creation with a wide, joyous grin.

The aftermath of the Sports Festival is, for Shouto, similar to the aftermath of a natural disaster— and that's an accurate description, because there is no other way to describe how Midoriya Izuku barrelled into Shouto's troubles headfirst with all the ferocity of a storm, and brought his walls down in a single, fell swoop.

He's aimless. That grudge he'd gripped onto so tightly, for so long, is now gone. The pressure of his repressed Quirk is, too. In a word, Shouto feels quiet now.

But the cold chill deep in his bones has relented, and dissipated. And now, when he wakes up in the morning, life seems less like stumbling blindly into a blizzard, and more like stepping out into balmy sunlight.

The anger at his father, while still very much present, no longer gnaws on every thought of Shouto's; no longer does it haunt his every waking moment. And when he goes to visit his mother, for the first time in too long, the sunlight embraces him warmly as he leaves the house.

Shouto breathes in deeply, and can't picture anything being more comforting than this lone moment.

Except.

His mother's smile. It's a relic, fragile and beautiful and a little bit worn, a little bit broken, but it's bright and warm like the sun had been that morning, pretty in the same way freshly fallen snow is. His mother smiles at him, and Shouto feels all the warmth he did that morning as the sun's rays wrapped around him.

And some of the ice melts. Parts of Shouto he can't even remember, little fragments of memories tucked away into the recesses of his mind, emotions he can't put a name to but are overwhelming him nonetheless... they all come rushing back.

And everything is lighter. His heart no longer feels restricted and alone, cursed to stay isolated from everyone else. His lungs expand freely past the brittle cage of ice that has been shielding them since he was six. Shouto feels like he's alive, not just living, and the world is brighter. His ice doesn't ache like longing. His fire doesn't burn like bubbling, frothing rage and years of anger, not anymore.

If it weren't for the risk of invoking his father's rage on his mother again, Shouto would stay in this hospital room and talk and talk and talk until his voice gave out, and then he'd stay anyways. But he can't, not yet. Promising with his entirety that he'll return is the closest he can offer right now.

So he leaves, late into the evening, with no shortage of reluctance. From behind the clouds the moon shines bright and silver, peacefully blank. For a second, he sees himself in the distant satellite, disconnected and cold and lonely.

Now, less so. And Shouto knows what he has to do.

Before now, Shouto couldn't have ever pictured himself ever reaching out to a classmate to talk, let alone to offer his thanks, but Midoriya's number on his phone isn't something Shouto can ignore. Not after today, not after the Sports Festival. Not ever, not anymore.

The days flicker by without incident— aside from picking up an internship with the old man, who is blindly ecstatic about Shouto 'coming to his senses' or some other *nonsense*— and in the dark at night, with the moon in his periphery whenever the sky is clear enough to permit it, Shouto holds up his hand and feels the drag of the cold air against his skin, and allows tiny embers to bloom from his fingers, bright like miniature suns.

One night, during a patrol with his father— who Shouto is more than happy to ignore, instead focusing on the mostly blotted out stars speckling the sky, and the occasional glimpse of silvery moonlight from behind the clouds— that calm and orderly routine breaks into chaos, smoke, *screams*.

Catching glimpses of creatures not unlike the monster that still haunts Shouto's nightmares, the Noumu from the USJ, freeze his heart in its tracks and renders his blood molten.

But Shouto has more important things to focus on, and Endeavour is a capable hero— the message he'd gotten from Midoriya not-five minutes ago, before the world devolved into chaos and clouds of smoke drowned out the moon, takes precedent here. There's no time for fear or for hesitation.

Shouto chases the address he was given, and doesn't regret going alone because if he'd arrived any later, Iida could have died.

The fight is trying for tentative control— for Shouto's fire, and for the mystery turnabout Midoriya has shaped his Quirk into, green lightning gleaming brightly in the darkness.

The air is cold, biting, but Shouto barely feels the sting of it over the rushing blood in his ears, down his arm. The throbbing ache hasn't died down— and it's difficult to imagine how Midoriya can put up with this pain and worse when his Quirk backfires on him— but Shouto pushes it aside, shoves it deep down, and focuses his mind to the present.

Midoriya doesn't speak. His eyes keep flickering about the alleyway, but their standard nervousness isn't there, replaced by something calm and steady, analytical.

It hasn't been long— Shouto hardly knows if he and Midoriya can truly be classified as friends, because while that shared nationally televised beat-down holds a place deep in Shouto's heart, there's no way to tell if Midoriya feels the same— but Shouto knows in this moment, like the moon knows the sun will always chase it, that he doesn't have to cover his own back this time.

It's a relieving sensation, new and soft like the breaking of dawn. Facing down a serial killer most likely isn't the standard way people make their first friends, but somehow, Shouto is immeasurably glad for this moment. The pain in his arm dulls away to a background throbbing, adrenaline turning his blood molten in a way that used to be revolting but now, tentatively burning in the dark, shines a path forward that Shouto knows he'd have been blind to otherwise.

The training camp works Shouto to the bone— until his ice cracks and his fire sputters out, in a perpetual daze from the extreme temperatures— but never any further than that. It's a pleasant change from how training works at home.

Everyone is pushed to the brink. Shouto won't deny that the fresh air feels good, with his Quirk's elemental nature most likely being the cause for his newfound comfort. The sun blazes overhead during the day, unrelenting, and at night the moon casts an ethereal silver glow across the forested earth.

His eyes drift to Midoriya when he gets to take breaks, drawn to him like a moth to flame. Despite the same exhaustion wracking his frame, Midoriya still has the energy to smile, and to push ever forward. It must be as inspiring to others as it is to him, Shouto reflects, because the renewed determination on his classmates' faces after conversing with Midoriya mirrors his own.

The evening brings to Shouto several things— more occasions to utilise his Quirk in undaunting, domestic circumstances. Lighting fires to cook on is a simple but effective way to train, and the groans of relief he earns for helping his classmates lifts the exhaustion from his bones with ease.

Midoriya positively *beams* when he notices. Shouto barely stops embers from escaping his loose control. It's then that the warmth in his chest becomes pronounced, and it's then that Shouto realises that the way he's drawn to Midoriya is somewhat different to how he orbits everyone else.

Truthfully, this all is a new experience; training that comes with gentle reassurances and positive reinforcement, in place of beatings and vitriolic insults hurled like sharpened knives at every folly. With every passing second, Shouto can feel the precision of his Quirk growing, inching forward hesitantly, like the hues of the sky fading into one another as the sun sets and the moon rises.

The training isn't the only perk— the close proximity to all of his classmates indulges Shouto in one other form; in that his almost insatiable urge to study Midoriya is quenched by the smiles Shouto gets to watch out of the corners of his eyes. Radiant as always, it seems Midoriya is always smiling under the harsh sun.

The night approaches and settles silently, and the breezes rest in accordance to the sunken sun. Suddenly, the world is quiet, and it is soft, and everyone else has headed inside to rest by now, leaving only Shouto, Midoriya, and the stars above under the watchful dusk. The air is cold— Shouto's nerves jolt like electricity as, perhaps subconsciously, Midoriya hovers next to his left side as if falling into orbit.

Shouto doesn't dare move, eyes wide and mouth slightly parted.

He tries to not combust, and does a fairly decent job— however, trying to clamp down on a small smile before it can emerge is an exercise in futility. The warmth in his chest is starkly different to the byproduct heat from his Quirk; this is like bathing in sunlight, or dozing under a shady tree on a hot day.

Frankly, even if Shouto could move right now, he wouldn't. A moment of calm like this is to be cherished. The tangled mess of sensations coiling in his heart can be ignored for now.

Shouto's breath catches in his throat at the dim reflection of starlight in Midoriya's hazy green eyes. In this careful darkness, with silvery moonlight illuminating the world, it's impossible for Shouto to look away from him. The pressure of flames threatening to rise from his left side means little in comparison to this moment, fleeting and rare as it is.

A yawn overtakes Midoriya abruptly.

Transfixed, Shouto's attention drops slightly, from Midoriya's eyes to the canvas of his cheeks.

His freckles look like constellations, Shouto thinks dumbly, before the flush in his chest boils over, spreading across his face. A few embers float to the ground, a meteor shower of manifested emotion, despite his best attempts to hold them back.

Still half-asleep, Midoriya blinks and reaches a scarred hand out toward the embers as if they are the stars, and not the intricate murals decorating his cheeks, the constellations Shouto sorely wants to piece together.

"It's beautiful," Midoriya softly says. Shouto's heart leaps, but he remains silent. The clouds part like iridescent, delicate curtains, and silvery light drapes over the ground in the aftermath of it, and there's no place on Earth that Shouto would rather be

"It's beautiful," Midoriya softly says. Shouto's heart leaps, but he remains silent. The clouds part like iridescent, delicate curtains, and silvery light drapes over the ground in the aftermath of it, and there's no place on Earth that Shouto would rather be than in this moment, heart flying from some unknown, untold emotion.

Truly, it's a shame that the remainder of the training camp isn't allowed to be as peaceful as that night.

There's a weight in Shouto's gut in the aftermath of the villains' attack, one that refuses to sink or float. Compared that night of calm, the world has been flipped onto its side and off its axis, leaving Shouto shaken, drifting away without an orbit to ground him.

Visiting the hospital where everyone is being treated, where Midoriya is being saved, does nothing to alleviate the nauseating pressure crushing his lungs. Seeing Midoriya sedated in his hospital bed and twitching from his too-high fever only makes the knotting sensation in Shouto's lungs tighten. Even at this close proximity, he's too far away and Shouto finds himself longing for just two days ago where being this close could be held alike to sunbathing, where now there is only a void that Shouto knows needs filling, but can't fill alone.

He finds himself trying to stay close after Midoriya wakes up, three days later— as a pillar of support and to relieve the aching in his own lungs, spreading outwards like ivy.

Midoriya doesn't smile; his eyes are bleak and hopeless, his body language nothing short of anguished. Defeated. It looks wrong. This isn't the Midoriya Izuku he knows, the boy who shines with all the kindness of the sun. This is a facsimile of him, and Shouto won't allow him to suffer any more.

So he agrees on the makeshift plan to rescue Bakugou— because Midoriya was always going to go, was never going to be dissuaded from the path he decided to take, and the least Shouto can do now is offer his shoulder for the injured boy to lean on, and his power to protect.

A weight sinks into Shouto's gut the second Yaoyorozu announces their arrival in Kamino Ward. Hopefully, things will go smoothly for once.

...or not.

Before Yuuei, Shouto would never have noticed the finer nuances to his friends' moods as acutely as he can now. Mostly, because he's never had friends before now. Perpetually being distanced from the rest of the world does that to a person— and for the longest time, all Shouto had to mark the passing of each torturous day was the happiness on other peoples' faces that was so out of reach to himself. Perhaps he had, in part, grown to resent his father even more for keeping him from experiencing that kind of joy, and for forcing Shouto to build the walls of ice around his heart up so high, it numbed and blinded him to perceiving those seemingly-commonplace emotions on other people.

As of late, that ice has been melting away— slowly but surely worn down under the force of persistent sunlight. Perhaps that is why, when it begins, right after the announcement of the internship programs, Shouto notices it as keenly as he would notice his own pain.

Midoriya Izuku wears his heart on his sleeve like it's a strict rule— or maybe an old habit he refuses to break, for having never known anything else other than heated defiance in the face of every endlessly bleak situation he's shone through. He's vibrant enough for even *Shouto* to notice the change in him when he returns from Sir Nighteye's agency. What usually is a sunny smile and

impossible love for the world has been thoroughly eclipsed by a dim, weak excuse for his normal sunshine. It looks almost painful, the effort to which Midoriya dismisses the concerns of his friends. He's pale and withdrawn, refusing to share the weight on his shoulders with anyone in the room. Shouto frowns.

The room is loud and chaotic, but all he can see is Midoriya. In this class of bright lights trying to shine bright enough to beat back the darkness, Shouto sees Midoriya's wavering smile like a star on the verge of extinction, brighter than ever to detract attention from the inevitable collapse. That in itself is enough to rouse alarm in him— because Midoriya is a special person to Shouto, and he does not deserve to suffer under some great, impossible burden like he is right now.

"Midoriya," Shouto murmurs, once the rabble has died down and their classmates have begun drifting from the room, "is everything alright?"

As if in a daze or a waking nightmare, Midoriya looks up to meet his eyes— it's hidden well, but Shouto has spent plenty of time pouring over and over on his own mistakes. He recognises the look; the suffocating dread, and the strain of having to keep a failure pent up inside, because venting it is not an option, so that invisible wound of the heart instead must fester.

Midoriya's eyes, despite how his entire being *screams* 'grief', are not watery. They're absent of their usual spark, a sharp contrast to the mass spectrum of human emotion they usually contain.

And perhaps it's the hero-in-training in his psyche, or some long abandoned instinct to help others above all else, but Shouto knows within the depths of his heart that he can't let anybody, especially not his best friend, hurt so deeply on his lonesome.

"I'm fine, Todoroki-kun," Midoriya lies smoothly, "I just need to sleep."

Shouto watches Midoriya leave the common area silently, not even pausing to talk to Uraraka or Iida, a painful kind of focus drawing foreign tension into his shoulders— and Shouto is inexperienced in this field of heroics with doubts shadowing his every intention, because catering to more delicate matters isn't what he's been trained to do. But the tightening sensation in his lungs tells him clearly one thing: Midoriya needs support now more than ever.

Shouto gets the impression he doesn't intend on actually going to sleep, anyways. Anger always looks the same. The question is, what exactly is it that's managed to wind Midoriya so tightly into anger that he would burn out like this?

Shouto's answer comes a few days later in the form of the most obvious choice of explanation: the internships. Several more of his classmates grow quiet, though not to the extreme extent to which Midoriya has— or perhaps Shouto is simply more attuned to reading the way his moods shift than he is anyone else.

Over the passing days, Midoriya has only seemed dimmer, more withdrawn— hurting, and Shouto doesn't know what to do about it. How could he possibly go about comforting him when he's in so much pain, but doesn't want anyone to see it?

The answer seems clear enough. Shouto has a handful of rare instances where people have reached out to save him, so it only seems fitting to try and mimic the way Midoriya saved him. With a few choice words, and the right moment...

Shouto packs his book away into his bag to bury the groan that's so desperately trying to wriggle out of his throat.

How did Midoriya even do it...? *It's your Quirk, not his.* Sure, the words are simple enough, but to Shouto it was the sentiment underneath that had put the first cracks into his walls.

The right words, at the right time. How such a mundane prospect is so frightening, Shouto doesn't know. But, watching Midoriya from his periphery, there's no debating the fact that he has to do something.

It comes as a surprise that the perfect moment arrives at lunch, while Midoriya picks at his food with very little interest— a habit that's become standard procedure since the day he came back from his internship with the weight of the world on his shoulders. Asking about it only prompts a panicked response out of Midoriya, much to Shouto's disheartenment.

"Is everything alright?" The query rips the other half of Shouto's focus away from his soba. Dazed green eyes flicker about the cafeteria, landing anywhere but on the two people sitting next to him, and Shouto doesn't even need to watch to know all of Midoriya's energy and focus is elsewhere.

Iida says something else, lost to the cafeteria gabble— but clearly it means a lot to Midoriya. He freezes up completely, staring blankly at the

table. Shouto expects a quiet deflection, a continuation to Midoriya's disrupted orbit.

One droplet splashes against the table, then two, then four, and Midoriya is barely holding back sobs that wrack his entire frame within seconds, leaving Shouto to wonder how exactly he managed to hold back so much without his perpetual brightness being extinguished entirely.

"Heroes... heroes don't cry!"

Ah.

There's that perfect moment.

"No."

Even heroes cry when they have to, I think." I've seen you cry, and I know without a doubt that you are a hero, is what Shouto doesn't say. There's a time and a place for that; hopefully, that time will be one where Midoriya isn't crying no matter how hard he tries to hold it all back. Hopefully, that will be a time where Shouto's hesitation to say it will dissolve like moonlight on disturbed waters.

There. The slight cracking in Midoriya's misery— the way his eyes widen marginally, and his stuttering breaths abruptly falter into a smoother pattern.

Midoriya sniffles even as Shouto gladly gives up half of his lunch, even though he wants nothing more than to eat it. Iida does the same.

When Midoriya's tears flow anew, Shouto can easily spy the fragile upward tilt of his lips. It's fragile and barely there, nothing like the powerful and sunny grin he usually wears, but it's a start.

"You can talk to me whenever," Shouto murmurs in passing after lunch, on the way to their next class, "I really don't mind."

Hesitantly, Midoriya nods. Shouto's hand lingers on his shoulder for a second longer than strictly necessary.

When the internships end and Shouto, through arduous work and not-so-easy remedial lessons, earns his provisional license, it brings him no shortage of relief to see Midoriya genuinely smiling again— no matter how much more world-weary it is now than it was before.

It's a normal day when it happens. In the aftermath of the cultural festival, with hopes and spirits still high and the abundant chattering of his classmates drowning out the silence with pleasant rabble, Shouto's guard slips down— and he finds himself engaging in quiet conversation with Iida, Tokoyami, Midoriya— before it all goes wrong.

Of all the things Shouto had been expecting to arise from the end of this day, it hadn't been the sight of shaky footage of a massive fight erupting not too far away from where the Billboard Charts were just held.

And, his heart sinking into his gut as he stares, he definitely wasn't expecting his day to end on watching his father fight for his life against a Noumu that is clearly of or exceeding the calibre of the one All Might fought at the USJ at the start of the year.

It's difficult to make out details. It's almost impossible to distinguish between rogue flames and the reflection of the setting sun on shattered glass, and even more challenging to tell who's fighting and where in the chaos.

But one thing is clear. Endeavour, the new number one hero, is struggling badly against this villain. Even with Hawks' support— the reddening sun glistening off his Fierce Wings— there is no clear sign as to who will win this fight. Shouto's lungs cease working evenly at that revelation, and the room bursts into motion.

Even with his strained gasps for air caught between his teeth, Shouto catches a familiar scarred hand inching toward him out of the corner of his eye— he'll always recognise that hand, the meaning of the scars littering it, how far Izuku went for him that day— and the flinch that jerks out of him when it grazes his shoulder is instinctual, and regretted all the same. It wasn't intentional, far from it, because the warmth of Midoriya's hand is something he could never regret feeling, and the weight of it on barely grazing his shoulder now is enough to tie Shouto back down to Earth, and allow his eyes to regain their focus on the television screen where, beyond the chaos and the debris, he can see his father fighting the Noumu.

No matter how much Shouto hates the man for what he's put his entire family through, Shouto's breath catches regardless. Because no matter the hatred that has yet to be resolved, and the pain from wounds that will never heal, Shouto is not a malicious person by nature, and wishing death upon his father is a low he refuses to sink to.

Midoriya's hand, barely not touching him, is what Shouto focuses his stuttering attention onto. Seconds drag by like hours, and the sun descends beneath a blanket of clouds, and after what seems like an eternity of held breaths and clenched fists, disbelief, the world falls silent in a

unified, bated breath of anticipation.

Bloody and beaten, Endeavour raises his fist.

Shouto unclenches his; clasps them in front of his face and exhales a breath and hopes nobody can distinguish how shaky he truly is. Midoriya's hand rests on his knee, tentative and gentle.

It should be embarrassing how much relief it brings Shouto to have his orbit so firmly reestablished.

Shouto's feelings come to a head on a sunny day— the day of the joint training exercise with class 1-B. It isn't so much an action of affection as it is a moment of realisation, an inconveniently timed one.

It's during Shouto's fight with Tetsutetsu, one-on-one for now, while his teammates and their opponents duke it out elsewhere, that it becomes obvious. It's a bad Quirk matchup for Shouto, especially when he's already feeling somewhat woozy from tiredness— but that doesn't dampen his need to burn brighter and stronger; his desperation to do so allows him to stand proud, even as he thoroughly surpasses his own limits. The air is distorted from the heat Shouto's Quirk is putting out— he hopes his classmates who are watching this will be more motivated to fight during their matches.

He isn't entirely sure how Midoriya manages to inspire the spirit of *Plus Ultra* so deeply into others, but it seems like it's worth an attempt to do the same.

Maybe Shouto is pushing so far because he wants Midoriya to see that *he* can shine brightly too; that he's growing into a hero both he himself and his friends and family can be proud of. The sun beats down on him from overhead, bright and inspiring as ever, and Shouto steels his resolve in the face of it.

Which, looking back, may have been a mistake. A series of admittedly cunning maneuvers from the 1-B team has Shouto reeling, unable to adjust his body temperature in time to be functional. Iida comes barrelling at him, and the ground softens, and there's a heavy hit to the back of Shouto's head before the world fizzles out.

Oddly, Shouto doesn't feel bitter over the defeat— more so curious that he managed to push his limits so far just by etching Midoriya's words into his head, like a mantra.

The mind-melting, molten heat running through his blood doesn't abate after waking up— instead, the world remains somewhat staticky under his persistent fever, a natural consequence of overusing his Quirk, even after Recovery Girl dismisses him. It's not unfamiliar, but it *is* unwelcome as always.

Hopefully, he'll make it in time to see Midoriya's match unfold. His heart beats just slightly faster, like dying embers being stoked into lively flames once again, at the thought of it. After all, he'd managed to push his limits so far and smash past the rest of his hesitance, just by etching Midoriya's words into his head like his personal mantra. Exactly like the Sports Festival— the second those words floated into Shouto's head, they'd taken root once more and blotted out the rest of the world, leaving behind nothing more than the sound of blood rushing in his ears and the urge to be more.

Winding through the hallways, it takes a matter of minutes for Shouto to come outside once more to where the viewing screens are, and all of his classmates are watching, eerily silent, eyes wide. Shouto swallows roughly, rubs his left hand, and turns his eyes up to the screen just in time to see the inky, black mess of tendrils exploding out of Midoriya's arms— dilute like a bloodstain in water— smothering the familiar green sparks of his Quirk.

There's screaming— it's Midoriya, his voice void of that sunlike warmth, and instead bleeding panic into the training grounds. Shouto can't make a word of it out over the pounding of his heart in his ears, over the adrenaline surging through his blood as unused instincts rear up in response. They're ancient, old as time, so Shouto can't put a name to the sensation that rises up in him as he staggers to his feet, and is forced to bystand, forced to watch, as his world falls to pieces that are barely strung together by those writhing, vicious whips.

Being unable to help leaves a sour note in Shouto's mouth. Having to watch the entire situation unfold as a bystander is decidedly worse, more painful, because Shouto can't recall the last time he saw such wild panic smothering the determination in Midoriya's eyes like it is right now.

As abruptly as they arrived, the tendrils recede, and Midoriya is swept unconscious by Shinsou's Quirk. It doesn't last too long, a few mere seconds, but it lasts an eternity to Shouto, and probably longer for Midoriya.

Aizawa leaves the match to continue, but Shouto can easily suss out the

worry and the confusion in his eyes. All Might looks twitchier than usual; probably concerned, too.

It's a narrow victory, and after one more brief emergence of those tendrils— which look like a secondary Quirk...?— that has Shouto's heart stuttering again, the match draws to a close with Midoriya's team on the winning side.

"Are you alright?" Shouto mutters in passing.

Voice strained, Midoriya simply nods, still clutching at his right arm like it's physically paining him. The impossibly bright determination in his eyes is subdued, hazed over by a mixture of confusion and exhaustion, and even though the sun is still blazing overhead, Midoriya seems like he'd like to do nothing more than sleep in this instant.

Of all the bizarre things Shouto thought he would experience by inviting Midoriya and Bakugou to intern with him under Endeavour, a dinner party organised by Fuyumi was not an item on that list.

They're all bruised, battered by relentless work and constantly having to pursue the Number One Hero through the streets like stragglers, but it's been fulfilling enough, progressing and training and improving with every passing day. And now, under the careful watch of the moon, gravel crunching underfoot as Shouto walks the familiar walkway to his house— ignoring, with a small smile, Midoriya's hushed exclamations about the size of the estate— the feeling of contentment has settled firmly into his heart.

True to her open and affectionate nature, Fuyumi greets them all with a smile. True to *his* nature, Bakugou only grunts, whereas Midoriya smiles brightly.

Truthfully, it's bizarre to have Midoriya and Bakugou, his friends, step foot inside the house that stole away his childhood. The conflict between these things Shouto is so familiar with— the pain and the loneliness seeping through the walls of this house like clinging shadows on a full-moon night, and just how drastically Midoriya's sunshine-like presence offers something much more transfixing to focus on— is dizzying.

But not in a bad way. The sky is clear, as clear as Shouto's mind as he settles next to Midoriya at the table, and it's smooth sailing from there on out.

For about three minutes.

Natsuo doesn't hide his displeasure about forced contact with their father, nor does he bother to mask his contempt— frankly, Shouto doesn't blame him for it. Midoriya watches Shouto cautiously, but not subtly.

After Natsuo abruptly leaves, Midoriya is the first person to start helping clean up the mess from dinner. Bakugou stomps off, following Midoriya's lead— thank god he hasn't realised he's doing so, because while Bakugou's unreasonably explosive temper regarding the green-haired boy is fun to watch, Shouto doesn't exactly want Fuyumi to be upset by that— leaving Shouto and his sister to finish tidying up the plates.

For a moment, Shouto thinks this will be how the night will play out: awkward silences, dredging up painful old memories, and discomfort all around.

And then Midoriya reenters the room, and stuns Shouto's world silent once again.

"But because you're so caring yourself..." Izuku says softly, like he hasn't just knocked the air clear out of Shouto's lungs.

It's one thing to compare the moon to the sun, but another thing entirely for Izuku, the person who illuminated his life again, to say that Shouto shines as brightly as he does.

And at the end of the night, after the dinner party is over, and after Natsuo is safe again, those are the words that accompany Shouto into sleep, guided by the solace of the moon, and the reassurance that the sun will rise brightly the next morning.

envoys of dawn and dusk.

Credit to @sevedraws

Credit to @Oniimely

between their shared skies

Written by: uttertrashdumpster

★ ★ ★

Midnight
The moon shines bright
Over Shouto's head
As he lays in bed
Cold, alone
Halfway across the world
From home.

Midday
The sun shines bright
Over Izuku's desk
As he cleans up the mess
His coworkers left
Sorting through files and plans
Just waiting to go home.

He wouldn't miss me,
Shouto thinks
He has his sun, golden
And warm with life
He has a world of family
Of friends and memories
He wouldn't have to moon over
Someone like me.

He wouldn't miss me,
Izuku thinks
He has his moon, luminous
And loyal with its gentleness
He has a world of mystery
A path to success and discoveries
His future is plenty sunny enough
Without someone like me.

But between all the time zones
That separate their homes
There exists a moment:
One calls it dawn
The other calls it dusk
Where, in the pink
And blue of sky
The sun and moon must meet.

It's New Year's Eve
Their overdue reprieve
Clad in kimonos, festive
They walk hand in hand
Past the stalls
Of food and games
And people enthralled
To steal away
Into the forest
And watch the day transition.

Two balls, pulsing
Red and white
Over a foliage
Of green.

As Izuku's eyes
Glow silver and bright
And the mismatch in Shouto's
Wash away with golden light
They realize
Maybe they do miss
Seeing each other, after all.

Orbiting

Written by: Andrateia

★ ★ ★

There once was a boy
Who the sun shone with
Day by day, as his face split into smiles,
As he ran around fields and sand beaches.
Could his dream come true?
Would he, some day, help another?

They say when you come to this world,
You are blessed by one of the stars.
And how rare for the Sun to choose a child!
What happiness this brings to his family!
After all, the Sun is the kind king of the skies,
Warm, bright and pleasant.

But who would dare get too close to the Sun?
Don't burn your wings, little bird,
For the Sun is kind but powerful, too powerful.

As the boy laughed and ran around with his friends,
He stumbled upon one
Quiet as the night, scar reminding him
Of the dark side of the moon,
Feared and unknown to all but him.

Don't leave! Don't be scared.
I know life isn't fair
But you mustn't forget
That your fate is yours (and a little bit mine)
And what hurt you, you can always escape.
I will be there, with you,
All along the way.

And no matter how lonely life can be,
If you stay here with me,
I will make you smile
If only for a while.

Because I, Son of the Sun,
And you, Son of the Moon,
Were made to be together
More than anyone else on this Earth,
Among these stars.

There once was a boy
Who the moon shone upon
Night by night, as he cried pearls and stars,
As he stayed in a cold room and colder home.
Could his dream come true?
Would someone help him, ever?

They say when you come to this world,
You are blessed by one of the stars.
But how sad for the moon to choose this child -
What disappointment befalls the child's father!
After all, the Moon is nothing but a shadow,
Cold, dark - forgotten.

But could he dare step out into the light?
Spread your wings wide, little bird,
For the Moon is more than a shadow, and so are you.

As the boy went for an errand on his own,
He stumbled upon one
Shy as the day, scars reminding him
Of the gentle rays of sun,
Warm on his skin, freedom of life.

Leave me! It's useless.
You say life isn't fair
But you must understand
My fate was never mine (still a little bit yours)
And who hurt me, I can never escape.
But if you're there, with me,
Maybe I'll be fine.

And no matter how hurtful life can be,
If I stay here with you,
I know I'll be happy,
As happy as I can be.

Because I, Son of the Moon,
And you, Son of the Sun,
Were born just for each other
And not anyone else on this Earth,
Among these stars.

So take my hand;
I'll take yours.
We were born under two stars,
And as opposites attract each other,
We fit together.
They call us soulmates.
Blessed children,
Orbits,
But we know what led us to find the other
Wasn't fate.
It was free will, it was choice.

It was our own power.

over 1300 kilometers to closure

Written by: calamansifresh

★ ★ ★

PROLOGUE: SUNRISE

What do you pack for a trip to see a father you haven't seen in two decades?

It was the question that plagued Izuku's mind as he rifled through his closet. There was so much damn All Might merch stuffed to the brim, it was embarrassing. Weird how his fondness for the comic book character was never a shameful trait for him before, but here he was, scrambling to find one freaking shirt that wasn't a gaudy yellow, red, and blue. Hell, he'd kill for a proper dress shirt that didn't say "dress shirt" on it.

The nerves stemmed from being on the verge of his impending cross-country trip to invite his very much estranged father to his college graduation.

Then, into his room walked the very handsome number two item on the list of things that made him anxious about this trip: Todoroki Shouto, aka the boy he's been head over heels in love with since freshman year.

"Ready to go? Uraraka and Bakugou are waiting."

Startled by Shouto's sudden appearance, Izuku nearly dropped the limited edition All Might Bronze Age shirt in his clutches. Shouto wore a simple button up open over a white shirt with tapered jeans, but his model-like features could make the most casual of outfits look runway ready.

The very thought of being around his longtime crush at all hours of the day and night... well, let's say it wasn't great for Izuku's blood pressure. He could practically feel the steam leaking from his ears.

"Um..." Izuku glanced over to his bed and Shouto followed his eyeline to the open duffel bag, mostly empty with the exception of a toothbrush and a couple of pairs of boxers. Next to it, a pile of discarded clothing he had already deemed unworthy.

Shouto tilted his head to the side, hair beautifully curtaining one side of his face like a waxing crescent. "I think you're gonna need more than underwear for this trip," he said.

Izuku barked out a laugh. "I know that! It's just that, well... this... it's my dad."

The word felt foreign on his tongue. Now at twenty-two years old and mere weeks away from graduating from the elite Yuuei University at the top of his class, he hadn't put that word to use for the better part of his life.

It was at a time like this when he could hear Ochako say something like, "Cheer up! It's going to be fine," or Kacchan say, "Listen loser, suck it up and get it done." Their default reaction was to uplift his mood or light a fire under his ass... which was totally fine! Sometimes the situation, especially one like this, called for such sentiments. He certainly did the same thing for his friends often.

On the other hand, Shouto simply hummed in response and took a seat next to the open bag and pile of clothes.

Izuku appreciated how he made space for him to process, to feel. He was different in that sense. Well, he was more than just different. Every day spent with him made his life better; it was as simple as that.

He sighed. "Why am I doing this again?"

"You don't have to go through with it if you don't want to."

Izuku mulled over Shouto's suggestion in his head. This was true. But something in him said he had to, no matter the consequences.

"No, I should. This is important. I've made a commitment and I should stick to it. Now is as good a time as any to do this. Yes, it's going to be hard because getting the things you want doesn't always come easy. But the payoff is the goal, right? Besides, we've been planning this trip for ages. Ochako and Kacchan would be so disappointed."

Somehow, here he was convincing Shouto (but really himself) with a long-winded explanation that this was a good idea.

"What would actually be disappointing is you feeling pressured to go through with something that you don't want to." And here was Shouto being the voice of reason in all of

this.

“I can make this easier for you if you want?” he offered.

Izuku ran a stressed hand through his mop of hair. “Have at it, because I’ve run out of ideas on how to make one of the most difficult things ever less excruciating.”

Shouto reached out and patted him on the arm. “I’ll take care of it.”

He proceeded to grab a haphazard armful of outfits from the top of the pile and stuffed them as a ball into the duffel. After zipping up the thing, he clapped his hands as if dusting them off, and stated with finality, “Done!”

Izuku couldn’t tell if Shouto was joking or if the years of being a pampered rich kid who never had to pick outfits for himself were rising to the surface at this moment. Either way, he let out a chuckle that accelerated into a loud guffaw and rushed forward, stepping between his knees to hug him around the shoulders at the silly gesture.

Upon pulling away, he noticed how red-faced Shouto was and, oh no, did he make him uncomfortable? He immediately stepped back and with hands up, got to talking fast.

“I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean… oh, that was weird of me!” He stammered out a string of apologies, unable to meet Shouto’s eyes.

Shouto interrupted him with an icy tug on the wrist.

“Everyone needs a hug once in a while. If you ever need one, I’m here for you.” He opened his arms, inviting Izuku to step back into his embrace, which he did happily.

Was this really happening? Shouto offering to be his personal hug vending machine? This trip was already off to a good start and hopefully this served as a good omen for the rest of it.

PART I: CRESCENT

Outside of Izuku’s apartment building was where the car awaited them. The clunky piece of junk was on its last wheels but well-loved by its owner, Ochako.

“Are we sure it’s gonna make the journey?” Izuku asked.

“I heard that!” Ochako yelled. She gave the hood of the car a hefty fist bump. “This baby got me through high school and college. It can get us through this trip!”

Meanwhile, Kacchan was scowling like he was ready to implode.

“What the fuck was taking so damn lo—”

Shouto picked up Izuku’s bag and flung it towards Kacchan, hitting the blond in the stomach with an unpleasant thud. He doubled over and wheezed. Despite the wind being knocked out of him, he still managed to give Shouto the finger.

Ochako shook her head at the scene and looped her arm around his. “The big trip is finally here! How are you feeling?”

“Excited? Nervous? Like I wanna throw up? All of the above?” Izuku gave a little laugh to ease the tension in his gut. “It’s a lot.”

Sometimes, smiling and pretending like everything was going to be okay, even as his insides swirled with uncertainty, was a way to confront the difficulty of the moment. That strategy (thank All Might) helped him through some of his darkest days. Why wouldn’t it help him now?

She nodded vigorously, switching to looping her arm through his. “Makes sense, especially since—”

“I mean, it’s been, what, two decades? That long since I’ve seen my dad. All of this is kind of surreal to be honest.”

She smiled kindly. “Yeah, I totally get it. Not that I understand *completely,* obviously. But I hear you.”

He patted her arm, ready to let her go and get this trip started but her fingers were steadfast on him, fingers clutching his taut muscle fibres.

“So like, actually,” she searched around them and dropped her voice to a whisper, “I also wanted to ask how you felt about getting to spend all this time with Todoroki.”

“With… eh?!” Izuku’s eyes widened. “It’s going to be like always, the way I hang out with you and Kacchan. Right?”

“Oh, please. Don’t give me that. I know you wanna run your hands through that expensive dye job and plant a big wet one on those lips.” She accentuated her point by playfully threading her fingers through Izuku’s unruly locks.

“Ochako! We’re just friends!” he hissed, grasping her hands in his as she giggled. His burning cheeks contradicted his words, as if the saturation of redness was an indicator of how much he wanted to be more than friends. In this case, Izuku was fire truck red.

She squeezed his hands back. “Exactly my point. This trip is as good a time as any to tread into more-than-friends territory.”

Izuku glanced at Shouto, who was helping Kacchan tetris together their luggage and camping gear so it could all fit in the trunk.

He shook his head in disagreement, “No. He doesn’t see me like that.”

“Don’t sell yourself short. We’ve seen women, men, and enby’s alike throwing themselves at that guy’s feet. Four years later and he’s still single.” She raised a curious eyebrow. “Why do you think that is?”

“Well,” Izuku took a deep breath, “After a less-than-ideal childhood and watching his parents’ marriage dissolve, he has deep-seated family issues, which have now manifested into his own set of trust issues, therefore preventing him from developing interpersonal relationships beyond friendship?”

Ochako hummed in thought. The two let the silence hang for a moment to observe Shouto and Kacchan squawk at each other over the best way to tackle the issue that was too much luggage.

“Okay, yes,” she finally conceded, “That may be all true. But also... pot, meet kettle.”

“Hey!” Izuku interjected. “A heavy dose of truth about myself is not what I need right now.”

She grinned. “My point is that I think he likes you, too! He’s holding out for you.”

“Nope!” He threw his arms up to form an X in front of his body. “No way!”

She grabbed his wrists and pulled them back down to his sides. “Excuse me! You are a *fucking* catch—”

“Someone’s been hanging around Kacchan too much,” he muttered.

“—and anyone would be lucky to be with you.”

“Your faith in me is acknowledged. Do I still think you’re wrong? Yes.” He topped off his statement with a boop on her nose.

Ochako gripped him by the shoulders and shook him, his head bobbing around as if he were a doll in her clutches.

“How do I get through to you?!” she demanded, each word punctuated with a shake. She was just short of stomping her feet like a toddler and throwing a tantrum.

“When you two are done, can we go? We’re burning daylight!” Kacchako shouted over to them.

“Us?! You’ve taken forever to pack our stuff,” Ochako shot back.

As the two continued to squabble and ironically waste even more time, Izuku joined Shouto in the backseat. He was happy to innocently sit next to his crush, and secretly harbor images of walking a hand across the seat to grab his. To wonder what that perfectly smooth skin felt like in his palm. To intimately clasp their fingers together the way that couples do.

In the midst of his daydream, Shouto looked over at Izuku and lobbied over that small smile that one only notices if you’ve studied his face enough. Izuku certainly was one of those people. And subtle as it was, the uptick of the corners of his lips paired with a glint in his gaze that Izuku felt was reserved for only him.

It added credence into Ochako’s words and made him wonder — what if?

After surviving Kacchan’s wild driving and almost crashing multiple times in the span of an hour, the occupants of the car insisted on someone else being at the wheel. Shouto and Izuku moved up to the front and Ochako relocated to the back with Kacchan grumbling the whole way.

“My driving is fine!” he fussed as Ochako strapped on his seatbelt for him. He crossed his arms and pouted, an unwilling participant in being relegated to the passenger role – backseat, no less. “You’re all ungrateful bastards.”

It was smooth sailing from there, and eventually everyone dozed off as they chugged along towards their destination for the night: Ochako’s childhood home in Mie.

“You awake?” Shouto asked, stirring Izuku from his barely there slumber.

“Yeah, can’t sleep.”

Truthfully, Ochako’s heavy-handed encouragement rang in his head like church wedding bells, signifiers for a happy day but annoying nonetheless for those not celebrating. As a result, he struggled to fall asleep, especially with Shouto’s hand inches from his. How easy it would be to reach over and lace those long fingers through his own.

I know you wanna run your hands through that expensive dye job and plant a big wet one on those lips, Ochako’s words repeated in his head.

You know nothing! a grumpy internal Izuku yelled back.

He paused.

Okay, so you know everything! he conceded.

Izuku checked the back seat. All quiet in the peanut gallery.

This trip was about being brave. About getting what he wanted and finding closure. Why not include Shouto and make it a package deal?

Izuku slowly reached out, fingers crawling across his thigh at a pace nearly undetectable. His breath gained speed with every millimeter, powering his muscles forward like a steam engine. And right there, between their armrests was the car's unofficial grey area, the same zone where Shouto's hand rested on the gear stick. A split second before skin made contact with skin, the car shuddered violently as it climbed a perilous hill, pulling everyone out of sleep.

"What the hell!" Kacchan yelled as Ochako yawned loudly.

The sudden jolt also meant the immediate retreat of Izuku's hand.
"My bad," Shouto huffed, seemingly embarrassed. "Shifted gears a little too late."

"No worries!" Izuku tried to comfort him. "I know we're in good hands."
Shouto shot him a wry half smile.

"Right."

Izuku turned away, feigning to be interested in the views of the countryside under the light of dusk. It was all he could do to prevent himself from burying his face in his palms and screaming.

PART II: SOLAR FLARES

The Uraraka household was a cozy fit for all six occupants that night. After dinner, the apartment was bustling with cleaning dirty dishes from the dining area and moving furniture out of the way to make space in the living room for the boys to sleep.

As Izuku pushed the coffee table to the wall, a large photo album fell to the ground on its spine, landing open on a page with naked baby pictures.

"Oh, Ochako!" Izuku called her over with a teasing lilt to his voice.
"What's this?"

One glance at the book on the floor and she came racing across the apartment to snap the album shut and hold it tight to her chest.

"Oh my god, Mom!" she complained.
"What is this doing out?"

"Your dad was feeling nostalgic," her mom explained with a shrug. "You know what a sap he is."

She turned on her heel to redirect her ire towards her father. "Dad! That's so embarrassing!"

"It's not embarrassing," he reassured her. "It's cute!"

He took the album from her hands, sat on the couch, and opened it up in his lap to reveal toddler Ochako in a softball uniform holding a catcher's mitt.

"As you can see, she's a big fan of the Mie Manatees, like her dad," he beamed, showing off the page to everyone like it was show and tell day at school.

"Dad!" she pleaded through clenched teeth.

Kacchan cackled and jumped over the back of the couch to sit by Ochako's dad. "I have to see this!"

Shouto stood from behind, slight smirk on his face as her father continued to go through the various stages of her life via photographs.

The scene of the doting dad was heartwarming, and yet, Izuku could only compare Ochako's stack of albums to his own blank memory book for an absent father. With every turn of the page, each picture represented a captured moment for the Urarakas that didn't exist for the Midoriyas. He was incomplete.

The room closed in on him and his chest tightened with jealousy at the normality of it all, of two parents who obviously loved each other and loved their child just as much, if not more.

It was suffocating.

Shouto ticked his eyebrows up at him. Of course he noticed his change in demeanor, no matter how slight.

Izuku gave a strained smile to stave off his concern and quietly escaped to the balcony to clear his head.

Moments later, the glass door slid open behind him, allowing the boisterous happy family laughter from inside to spill out for a second before it closed again to muffle the sound.

Izuku continued to face outward, concentrating on the scattered twinkling lights of Ochako's small hometown.

"Uraraka's parents are nice," Shouto broke the silence. "She's really lucky."

"That's the thing. She wasn't lucky. That's how families are supposed to be. We were unlucky."

"That's pretty harsh."

Izuku gave a shrug like he had given up. "Isn't it true though?"

"I dunno." Shouto furrowed his brows in thought. "Luck looks different to everyone. I feel like life is life, and you can deal with it or even better, work to change it."

“Why the fuck do we have to change anything to begin with?” Izuku scoffed. “Is it really so much to ask for a family that loves us? It’s so basic.”

“I beg to differ. I wouldn’t be where I am without my past.”

“Can you just let me have this?!” Izuku hoarsely yelled.

Shouto backed off.

Izuku sucked in a breath. “Wait, I’m so sor—”

“I’ll… give you some room.” Shouto shuffled back into the apartment and Izuku was alone again.

“I’m such an idiot.” He curled his hand into a fist and knocked it into his head.

Izuku folded his arms, wanting to fold into himself. It wasn’t Uraraka’s fault she had a supportive family behind her. Plus, it’s not like he had a bad childhood; his mom made sure of it. To top it all off, he lashed out at the one person who was trying to sort through his feelings with him. Guilt now joined the jealousy, making him feel doubly worse.

The gang was making good time on the way to their campsite for the night. The Uraraka family had packed them more than enough delicious food to last them the next two days before they reached their destination far south.

Izuku had been feeling a little worse for wear after his awkward conversation with Shouto, so when he saw his mom’s name pop up on his phone for a call during a pit stop at a roadside convenience store, a part of him felt like he didn’t deserve to talk to her. But upon hearing her voice, all the bad feelings melted away like butter.

“Don’t forget to try the Kurobuta when you get to Kagoshima,” she advised. “You’ll love it!”

“Got it on my list. I gotta go but I’ll see you back home in a couple days.”

“Too old to talk to your mother?” she joked.

He laughed back. “Aw, you know it’s not like that!”

“I know, I know. It’s just… Gosh, you’re growing up so fast.” Their conversation quickly turned sentimental, as talks with his mom often did. “You’re going to be graduating soon. Getting your own place. Starting a family,” she sniffed.

“Mom!” He rolled his eyes playfully, even if she couldn’t see him. “I’m twenty-two. I still have a long way to go.”

“Of course. I just wish…” Her words hung in the air as she trailed off.

“Wish…?” He tried to encourage the rest out of her.

She paused notably. “Oh, never mind. It’s all in the past. Anyway, you know I love you, right?”

The sting of guilt stabbed Izuku right in the chest. His mind completed the unfinished sentence for her. *I just wish your father were here to see you.* Memories of being a young boy and hearing his mom crying through the walls came flooding back to him.

“I know,” he choked out. “I love you, too.”

“Oh, don’t you start crying or else you’re gonna get me going too. I’ll see you when you get back.”

Izuku sighed heavily as he hung up the phone. He turned his attention back to Shouto who was waiting patiently with a bottle of water. Izuku took large gulps of his drink, trying to drag his tears down with them.

“Sounds like you haven’t told your mom?”

“I couldn’t,” Izuku admitted. “What do I even say? Hey mom, guess what, this isn’t some fun graduation trip like you thought. I’m on the way to talk to the guy who abandoned us all those years ago. Yeah, right. What would she think?”

“I dunno, I feel like she’d understand,” Shouto mused. “Wouldn’t she want to know you’re doing this?”

“She doesn’t even think about the guy anymore. I don’t want to bring up those memories for her if I don’t have to.”

“That’s fair. But let’s say your dad accepts your invitation. That’s the goal, right? How are you going to break the news to her?”

The corner of Izuku’s mouth twitched in irritation. And yet, Shouto wouldn’t be Shouto if he weren’t blunt and to the point. He was challenging him — and rightfully so, these were all valid concerns — but in this emotionally vulnerable state, it felt like an unfair attack.

“We’ll get to that conversation when we get to it,” was Izuku’s curt reply.

Shouto pushed it further. “I think you should be prepared. He was your dad, but he was also her partner and that should be taken into consideration.”

“I am taking it into consideration!” he snapped back. “Like I said, I’ll handle it if it gets that far! You don’t have to worry about it!”

“Okay.” Shouto recoiled slightly, and Izuku immediately regretted his tone.

“I’m only mentioning it because I care about you. You’re my best friend.”

His words were felt right in the chest, each letter its own separate prickle. “I know, I’m—”

“Besides, after that conversation with your mom, I think it’s a little contradictory to say you were unlucky growing up.” He followed that up with a quick, “I’m sorry.”

Suddenly, he stood up to throw away his empty pork bun wrapper, leaving Izuku with the discomfort of receiving an undeserved apology when one he wanted to give still lingered at the edge of his own lips.

PART III: PHASING UP

The rest of the ride to the campsite was full of tension so thick Izuku’s skin itched as if ants were crawling all over him. Even Kacchan played the role of responsible driver to ease the heavy sense of worry hanging over them. Finally getting to the campsite offered them a bit of reprieve from the tightness of the car.

Shouto magnetically strolled to Ochako’s side to pitch the tent, leaving Izuku and Kacchan to set up the campfire and food.

“So… you and Halfie going out yet?” Kacchan casually dropped while spreading a tablecloth over their picnic bench.

Izuku choked. “Oh my god, Kacchan! I am not having this conversation with you.”

“Get over it, Deku. It’s been obvious since our first year that you two have the hots for each other. Hook up already.”

“We are not having this conversation.” Izuku shook his head in disbelief. “Nope. I can’t believe we are having this conversation right now.”

“Look, let me save you the stress.”

Izuku’s eyes widened. He knew what was coming. He grabbed Kacchan by the collar of his shirt and hissed into the jerk’s face through clenched teeth, “You shut your damn mouth right now.”

He smirked right in his face before cupping his hands around his mouth and yelling, “Hey, Half and Half! Get your ass over here! Deku has something he wants to say!”

“Asshole!” Izuku cried. “You are such an asshole!”

“Oh my god, you suck so bad!” Kacchan whisper-yelled back.

“Did Ochako put you up to this? She did, didn't she? I freaking knew…” As Shouto approached them, Izuku’s tone changed. “Oh, *hey* Shouto.”

Shouto’s eyes bounced suspiciously between him and Kacchan. “You had something to ask me?”

Izuku quickly let Kacchan go and strode up to his crush. “Yeah I… uh…” This was awkward as hell! The last two conversations they shared were riddled with arguments and no sense of closure. Damn Kacchan for pushing him into this! “Did you… see the… weather report this morning? Says it’s going to be hot again tonight.”

“I… did not, but thank you for informing me.”

“I was thinking… since it’s going to be so hot, maybe you and Ochako don’t need to put the rainfly on the tent?” Good save, he praised himself.

“Ah, good point. We’ll leave it off then. Better circulation. Is that all?”

“Yup!”

“Well, okay then.” He shot them one last look of skepticism before making his way back to Ochako.

“What the hell was that about?” Izuku could hear her ask.

Shouto mumbled back. “Not really sure. They wanted to talk about the weather?”

She gave an exasperated sigh and called out to them, “Are you two going to make yourselves useful, or what?”

“Yeah, after I beat this guy up!” Kacchan jumped over to Izuku to put him into a playful headlock.

Izuku wrestled out of it and lightly slugged him back in the stomach. “Not if I beat him first!”

“Shut up!”

“No, you shut up!”

Ochako looked to Shouto and rolled her eyes as the boys roughhoused, zigzagging between the pine trees after each other, competing to declare victory with one last hit. “They’re like children, I swear.”

He smirked back. “It’s kind of endearing.”

Ochako made a big show of yawning and stretching her arms to feign exhaustion as the group finished up dinner.

“Wow, it’s getting pretty late. Time to hit the hay, wouldn’t you say?” she asked Kacchan.

His eyes bounced to her, a piece of a pork cutlet dangling from his lips. “The hell you mean? The sun’s barely down and I’m still eat–”

She grabbed the bowl from him and scarfed down the rest of his food for him. Before he had a chance to begin screaming, she grabbed him by the elbow and dragged him to the tent.

Izuku rolled his eyes when Ochako tossed him a wink as she and Kacchan entered their large shared tent to give him and Shouto some alone time.

Their hushed quarrelling was barely audible, but he still made out phrases like “my food” and “take a hint” and “hungry” and “eat later.” Eventually, the squabbling turned to silence and the crackling of the fire wasn’t nearly enough noise to swallow the thunderous tension between himself and the boy sitting next to him.

It was Izuku who parted the clouds. “Why did you say sorry to me back at the convenience store?”

“I knew it.” Shouto sighed and looked up at the sky, as if searching for answers. “I knew it wouldn’t be enough.”

Izuku was thoroughly confused. “Shou, you’re not making any sense.”

“I messed up, didn’t I? I shouldn’t have said those things to you. I was out of line, and I won’t do it again. Please forgive me?”

Izuku was taken aback by Shouto’s apology. “What the hell are you *talking* about? I’m the one who should be sorry!” And yet, it made perfect sense for Shouto to feel like he was the one in the wrong. He offered a quiet reassurance. “I’m not… I’m not like your dad, okay? You can say what’s on your mind with me.”

“That’s where you’re wrong. I don’t give a fuck about what my dad thinks.” Shouto looked down at his food for a second, then back up at Izuku, eyes shining. “But I do care about what you think. Maybe even a little too much.”

It took every fibre of his being not to physically swoon. The joy was almost unbearable knowing he could share his truth with him, and he wanted Shouto to do the same. “If I’m fucking up, tell me I’m fucking up. You didn’t do anything wrong, it was all me. You were being honest and I wasn’t having it.”

“No, I was focusing only on what I thought and I didn’t realize that I was pushing you when you weren’t ready. Or I guess I forced onto you what I thought was right without considering enough of what you think is right. I have a bad track record of doing that to people I care about.”

“Challenge me!” Izuku urged him. “I wanna know what you think, completely unfiltered. Let me move at your pace.”

The corner of Todoroki’s mouth ticked upward in a sly grin. “Think you can keep up?”

“Try me.” He pushed him back with a playful nudge of the shoulder until they were sitting with their hips touching.

“I may not care about what my dad thinks, but you don’t even know yours and you still care.”

“Yeah, you think I’m a total idiot for doing this, huh?”

He shook his head and spoke in almost a murmur. “Exact opposite. It takes a lot of heart to hold your hand out to someone who doesn’t deserve it. That’s you, Midoriya. The person with the biggest heart I know.”

Izuku closed his eyes with gratitude and rested his head on Shouto’s shoulder. They basked in the moment, the two of them, the fire, the moonlight, the weight lifted off their backs.

Eventually, Shouto raised his bowl to Izuku and asked, “You want the rest of my soba?”

After cleaning up and putting out the fire, Izuku and Shouto turned in. They planned to finally hit Kagoshima the next day so it was sure to be a draining one.

Unzipping the tent revealed Kacchan in the middle of the floor, sleeping like a starfish. Izuku pushed him over to make room for himself and Shouto. He heard a low mutter of the word “fucker” though he didn’t know if he was talking to him or saying that in his sleep.

Shouto said a quiet good night after laying down on his own sleeping bag. Izuku relaxed with his arms at his sides, hand dropping down to feel Shouto’s pinky under his. He indulged himself this one time and didn’t pull back. It was both relieving and maddening to feel Shouto curl his pinky back around his own.

He opened his eyes a sliver. With the rainfly shifted away from the tent’s window and moonlight streaming over the handsome planes of Shouto’s face (and maybe because it was blurry or he was imagining it) but Izuku detected it. That ghost of a smile.

They fell asleep like that, tethered to one another.

PART IV: SUNSPOT

“Well? How do I look?”

Izuku twirled around once for his friends, showing off the sad

combination of his “dress shirt” shirt and cargo shorts.

“You look… comfy?” Ochako’s compliment was accompanied by a stiff grin, doing her best to reassure him.

“Yes, quite comfortable!” Shouto added with a vigorous nod.

Kacchan scoffed. “Good lord, are you both insane? He looks like he’s twelve!”

“Wow, really appreciate that vote of confidence,” Izuku sarcastically replied. He knew he looked foolish, but it was hard to hear it firsthand.

“You!” Kacchan pointed at Shouto. “C’mere.”

Shouto pointed at himself with wide eyes, as if to say *Me? Why me?!*

“Gimme that.” Kacchan tore Shouto’s long sleeved button down shirt from his body and tossed it at Izuku. “Put that on.”

After Izuku slipped his arms through the sleeves, Shouto stepped forward to button up the shirt for him, fingers skirting their way up his torso with practiced ease over the fabric.

“I think it’ll look better like this,” he murmured.

Izuku let out a nervous chuckle, eyes staring at the ocean in the distance. “Ah, you think so?”

Then, Kacchan pulled out Izuku’s duffel and rifled through its contents. Upon finding a decent pair of jeans, he threw that in Izuku’s face as well. “Now those too.”

After changing in the car, Izuku stood before his friends to be judged once more.

The three of them circled around him this time, poring over him in finer detail, like sculptors judging their masterpiece. Normally, he’d be embarrassed at being scrutinized so closely, but he was mostly trying not to faint from the scent of Shouto’s shirt now clinging to his body.

“I know! How about this?” Ochako said. She unbuttoned the sleeves and rolled them up to cuffs at his elbows.

“Good call,” Shouto complimented.

Now this was getting ridiculous. “Are you done yet?” Izuku asked.

As if on command, all three brought their gazes down to his fiery red sneakers, looking bloated against his new outfit.

“I think we’re just about the same size,” Kacchan said, kicking off his black loafers.

“No!” Izuku took small steps to back away from his friends. “Not the shoes!”

“Yes, the shoes!” the three all yelled back at him.

They were doing their best to help him and it wasn’t like he was a fashionista by any definition. He groaned, but gave in and spun one last twirl in the completed outfit.

“How about now?”

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His gaze traveled across Ochako’s sparkling eyes, Kacchan’s self-satisfied grin… and finally, Shouto’s blushing cheeks.

“Damn Izuku, you look hot!” Ochako squealed.

He stuttered back, “I-I’m not trying to look hot! I’m trying to look presentable.”

“Nah, she’s right nerd. It’s a *look*.”

“What do you think, Shouto?”

Shouto’s eyes kept bouncing between Izuku’s face, around his body, and away. “You look… nice. Really nice. Your dad would be proud. And if he’s not, I am. I’m proud of you.”

He shyly responded, “I… I don’t know what to say.”

“A ‘thank you’ would be nice,” Kacchan interjected. Ochako slapped him on the arm with daggers in her eyes.

“You’re ready!” she encouraged him.

It was a modest house with a view of the ocean protected by a stone white wall. At the gate was a steel nameplate. How strange it was to see his own family name plastered like a brand but to not have a place there. The characters for “green” and “valley” were printed in an elegant brush script font and he smirked at the irony — was having a dad in his life really a “grass is greener” situation? Or was he walking himself into a disaster?

“Oh god, I think I’m gonna throw up.”

Shouto placed a sturdy hand on his back, just below the nape of his neck. “You got this.”

Izuku nodded with determination and walked with large strides to the front door as his friends waited outside the gates for him. With trembling fingers, he pushed the doorbell.

He turned back to them, eyes wide and mouth open. It was an expression that said, *I did it! No turning back now.*

The sound of the front door creaking open brought his attention forward and his friends scurried away from sight.

“Can I help you?”

The man standing at the door looked at him, scrutinizing him most likely due to his familiar appearance. Meanwhile, his dad was a funhouse mirror, a distortion of himself. But there was one dead giveaway that made Izuku certain they had shared the same DNA: a mop of dark and messy hair.

“It’s me, Izuku.”

His father’s eyes widened, immediately recognizing the name.

After a moment of awkward silence, he asked, “C-can I come inside?”

He sprang back to life after the initial shock. “Uh… yes! Of course. Please.” He stepped aside so that Izuku could enter through the front door.

They settled in the living room with his dad breaking the silence.

“It’s - uh - it’s been a long time,” he said as he led them through the hallway to the living room.

Izuku hummed in agreement. “That it has.”

“Does your mother know you’re here?”

“I…” He considered lying for a second, but didn’t think dishonesty would be a great way to start this conversation. “Well, no. No, she doesn’t.”

“I see,” was his dad’s simple reply. Perhaps he didn’t think that playing

“Would you like to have a seat? Some tea?”

“Oh! Sure. Tea sounds great.”

When his father left the kitchen, Izuku surveyed the rather barren room. There were a few pictures strewn about from what he assumed was his dad’s childhood, a couple of certificates here and there, but other than that, no especially personal objects occupied the space. Most notably: nothing that signified he or his mother were ever in this man’s life. Not that this was a surprise. People did not often display evidence of their failures on their wall for daily viewing.

“So what brings you here?”

He placed his drink on the table and wiped his sweaty hands on his jeans. “So, I’m graduating from Yuuei soon.”

“Yuuei?” His eyes ticked up in surprise. “Wow, congrats. That’s a great school.”

“Ah, thanks.” Izuku bashfully scratched the back of his head, secretly prideful that his dad was impressed by his accomplishments. “We’re having the ceremony later this month. In a couple weeks actually, just gotta get through finals first.”

“That so?” his dad politely replied.

Stop stalling and get to the question! he berated himself.

“I know it’s been a while, but I’ve been thinking lately that, I dunno. it would be kinda nice to have you there. I wanted to see if you’d like to attend?”

His father was stunned into silence.

“You don’t have to answer now!” Izuku nervously tried to save the already overwhelmingly awkward atmosphere. “You can think about it. There’s still some time until then.”

“I really appreciate the invitation.”

“Yeah?” Izuku perked up in optimism.

His dad stared into his tea and mumbled, “But I’m going to be honest, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

Izuku deflated. He didn’t know what he expected. A warm hug was certainly out of the question, but outright rejection immediately? It stung.

“But why not?” he quietly asked.

“I don’t feel like I have a right to be there. And your mother, what would she think?”

“I’m inviting you. Doesn’t that count for something? I’m reaching out here.”

“I’m sorry, Midoriya. I don’t know what to tell you.”

Midoriya. The distance between himself and his supposed father was cemented with the utterance of his family name. His lungs twisted, as if wringing themselves. He had traveled hundreds of kilometers to see him. All the missed calls and unanswered letters came flooding back into his memory. How could he be so cold?

“Oh. It’s okay. I get it. Say no more.” Izuku stood up and began to back away. “I’m so sorry for bothering you.”

A look of relief flooded across the face of his father — no — across the face of Midoriya Hisashi.

One step closer to the door.

What did we do wrong?

Two steps.

What could have made you stay?

Three steps.

Didn’t you want me?

A step short of marching out the front door with his tail between his legs, he stopped himself, feet planted on the ground to steel himself for the incoming avalanche of a question.

“Why’d you leave?”

The tension bled back into Hisashi. “I’m sorry?”

Izuku swallowed down the shakes in his voice and turned back around to face him. “It’s a simple question. Why did you leave?”

“I… you…” Hisashi paused to answer with measured breaths. “Your mother and I, we were young. I had a career that was going nowhere, then I got an offer here in Kagoshima. It was just gonna be for a couple months. But the month became a year, and then a couple years and… well. Time slipped me by.”

Izuku nodded, not looking at him, tone almost robotic and devoid of emotion “Right. Sure.”

“Before I knew it, you were all grown up. I’m… really proud of you, you know?”

“Okay.” What else could he say? The words he thought he always wanted to hear rang hollow, and a minimal response was more than what Hisashi deserved.

“There were opportunities here that I didn’t get back in Tokyo. And with the economy what it was, I had to jump on any offer I could get.” The man was spiraling in trying to mutter his failure away. It was ironic to see qualities in himself reflected in someone he couldn’t even recognize. “You’re graduating. Going into the job market, right? You’ll understand.”

Through clenched teeth, Izuku responded, “Yeah. Understand. I understand doing what you have to do. Because I did it. I did it all without your help. In a few weeks, I’ll be graduating at the top of my class from one of the most prestigious universities in the whole goddamn country. And my mom did it too. She raised me and put me through school without you. You couldn’t stay for more than a couple years, but she gave me twenty-two great ones. I barely even remember you. You’re a blip on the timeline of my life.”

“For what it’s worth, I’m sor–”

“No! I don’t want to hear it.” Izuku couldn’t believe the gall of this man. “Because if you were really sorry, you would’ve said it long ago.”

Hisashi gave a somber nod. “That’s fair.”

“Hope you have a great life, Midoriya.”

With that, Izuku left his father standing in the doorway.

It was the first time in almost a lifetime he had seen his father. And if he had any say in it, it would be the last time for the rest of his life. This time, Izuku walked out on his dad, and he did it with his head held high.

When Izuku returned to his friends waiting just around the corner from the house, he said four words: “I wanna go home.” It was brief and succinct, but told volumes.

For once, he was happy Kacchan’s speed demon skills were being used as they flew down the highway. In a cruel twist of fate (because when should his life ever go the way it should?) Ochako’s car broke down on the way to their campsite. As dusk transitioned to early evening, they managed to push the clunker to a beach parking lot.

They were all motivated to go home but with the heavy air of sadness surrounding them, they had little energy to make it happen.

So here they were, Izuku and Shouto sitting side by side on the car’s hood listening to the waves crash against the sand and the twinkle of Ochako’s playful laughter from a distance as she and Kacchan took a stroll along the shore.

“Why did I even do this? He doesn’t deserve to be there. He doesn’t want me. He never wanted me.”

He swallowed hard, urging the familiar lump in his throat to go away. He refused to shed one more tear for that man.

Shouto placed a hand on Izuku’s head, fingers entwining with the soft curls. Izuku looked up at him, red-rimmed eyes searching his face. Shouto’s gaze remained straight ahead on the ocean, but his cheeks were colored with a dusty red.

“Is this okay? I’m not sure if–”

Izuku interrupted Shouto by bridging the small gap between them by sliding over the hood of the car and burying his face into Shouto’s shoulder, the flutter of his eyelashes tickling his neck.

“Ah,” Shouto breathed out in surprise. But he didn’t recoil. He leaned into it, hand carding through green locks as he relaxed.

“Do you remember when I first dyed my hair, and you said it looked like a half moon?”

Izuku gave an embarrassed chuckle, the sound reverberating against Shouto’s skin.

“Yeah, oh my god, why must you remind me of that? It was such a lame attempt at complimenting you.”

Shouto buried his face into the thick of Izuku’s hair. “I liked it, though,”

he murmured. “It made me think... If I’m the moon, you’re my sun. So in times like these, I’ll reflect your sunshine back to you to remind you of how bright you glow.”

“That was so sweet. And so cheesy, you put my half moon comment to shame.” Izuku pulled back to look into Shouto’s face. “Who are you right now?”

Shouto stared right into Izuku’s eyes, corners wrinkled by his smile. “I’m... I’m someone who’s here for good. What your dad did was a shitty thing. I’m gonna be the opposite.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that you don’t have to worry about me ever leaving you. I’ll always be here for you, if you want me. I’m saying that... that only a fucking cosmic disaster could pull me away from you, and even if that were to happen, I’d find a way to force gravity to bring us back together.”

“Oh Shou, you’re ridiculous.”

“What? Too much for you? Thought you were gonna keep up with me.”

Izuku snorted out a laugh, wrapping his arms around his waist and squeezing. Even on his darkest days, when he didn’t think he could smile through it, Shouto was his beacon in the night, shimmering through the despair that threatened to engulf him, and showing him the way home.

With finals and graduation on the horizon, the four friends parted ways once they returned home. Kacchan departed with a clap on the shoulder, Ochako with a kiss on the cheek. When the two of them were gone, Shouto left him with a lingering embrace to remember him by.

Finally alone, he took in a deep breath. And released. With it, he let go of an entire lifetime’s worth of what ifs and have nots. He was on the verge of the rest of his life, and nothing would hold him back from moving forward.

PART V: FULL MOON

It was the day before graduation, finals were over, and Shouto was visiting.

“Nice suit,” he said.

The slim cut dark grey suit was freshly pressed and probably the most impressive set of clothing he’d ever owned. It was hanging next to his cap and gown, the second most impressive set of clothing he owned. Both purchases were a present from his mom, though he was pretty sure it was more for her than it was for him.

You want to look good in the pictures don’t you? she had said.

“I know, right? A real one this time.” Izuku snorted quietly, lamenting his ‘dress shirt’ shirt. “Can’t believe we’re graduating tomorrow.”

“Seriously. Four years went by just like that.”

“Next step, the real world. I’m so not ready.”

“What are you planning to do after graduation?” Shouto asked.

“Moving back home while I look for a job,” Izuku revealed. “It’s not the most glamorous plan, but it’s what I got. You?”

“Well. I’m getting an apartment in the city and I was wondering... maybe you wanted to live there for a while during your job search? And after you find a job, keep living there? With me?”

“Wait, what? What?!” Izuku practically shrieked. “Are you serious? You’re not fucking around, right?”

“Am I the type to fuck around?”

Izuku’s cheeks were already hurting with how hard he was smiling. He threw his arms around Shouto, pulling his body flush against him.

“I have to do this for what I’m about to say. And if I don’t say it now, I might run away. Don’t let me run away.”

He felt Shouto’s muscles relax as he wound his arms around Izuku’s back, hands meeting low and in the middle.

“I got you,” he whispered next to his ear, sending a shiver rattling through Izuku’s bones. Izuku clutched him by the fabric of his shirt to settle his nerves.

“You’re my best friend, it feels like I’ve known you forever. And as time goes on, I just keep falling harder for you because... I wanna be more than friends. I wanna be even closer to you, get to know you even more than I do now. I wanna know everything I could possibly know about you. What your face looks like after it’s been kissed. What—”

Just like that, Shouto tilted his chin upwards with a finger and kissed him. It was soft, and sweet, and everything Izuku imagined it would be. When he pulled back, Shouto quipped, “Well, what do I look like?”

His hair was messy, cheeks a rosy red, and he was downright gorgeous. Izuku reached up to stroke his jaw. “I think we’re gonna have to do that again so I can get a better

look.”

Shouto was more than happy to oblige.

The next day was a hot one. Izuku’s hair itched under his cap and sweat trickled down his forehead, but it didn’t matter. It was a day so full of joy, nothing could bring him down.

Ochako took one look at them and squealed, hitting Kacchan on the shoulder over and over to grab his attention.

“It’s about damn time!” he exclaimed when he finally set his eyes on his and Shouto’s joined hands.

“I know, right?” Izuku’s mom chimed in agreement, nudging Kacchan in the side with her elbow.

“Mom!” he exclaimed.

“Wow, even your mom shipped us?” Shouto joked.

Inko giggled and held up her camera. “Everyone, get together so I can take a picture of you all!”

With Shouto’s reassuring arm slung around his shoulders, Ochako squeezed against him and Kacchan on her other side, Izuku knew all he needed was the family he had now. A family that chose to be there for him. One he chose to keep in his life. And for the first time, he realized that he was whole.

To Taste the Sun

Written by: Library_of_Gage

★ ★ ★

“What are you thinking?”

A hand holds his own,
Making Shouto wonder
If this burning weightlessness
Is what astronauts feel
When they leave
Earth’s atmosphere
And learn to be
Free of gravity’s chains.

“It’s cheesy,” he says
And looks back at the stars,
At the sprawling night sky
Full of utter emptiness,
Heavenly bodies thrown too far
From his reach to even bother
Twitching a finger.

And Izuku, the embodiment
Of the light he spent
So many years thinking he’d never reach,
Smiles at him.
The slight upturn of his lips like
The pinks and blues and purples
Of the dawn
When staring straight into the light
Doesn’t hurt.

“I like cheesy,” Izuku tells him,
The words warm and bright.
They light Shouto up,
Lending him a brilliance he could never create on his own.

How does Shouto explain?
Where does he even begin?

The constellations were
Pointless shapes made by imaginary lines
Until he realized
They could be traced across Izuku’s cheeks.
The planets were just rocks,
Uselessly floating in places
He didn’t bother conceptualizing.
But Shouto loves them in ways he can’t understand
When Izuku talks,
Breathtakingly brilliant,
About water on Mars.

He never cared for the sun
Until it made a halo of Izuku’s hair.
He never thought of the moon
Until its fullness made Izuku smile.
He never believed in shooting stars
Until Izuku pointed one out
And whispered in his ear to make a wish,
One that came true a second later
When he saw the universe in Izuku’s kiss.

Shouto doesn’t know how
To explain these feelings.
So he doesn’t speak.
Instead, he turns to action,
The way he always does,
As inevitable as the planets orbiting the sun,
And presses his lips to Izuku’s.
Not for the first time,
And not for the last,
Shouto knows what it is
To taste the sun.

Moon Mochi

Written by: ~~Tellingandyelling~~

Content Warning: Minor character death (off screen)

★ ★ ★

Izuku's house is quaint.

Small and quaint. It is the type of house which people write enchanting fairy tales about. A small cottage hidden in the woods, away from the curious gaze of others. Sometimes, when someone did wander up to where he lived, Izuju offered them a nice meal and maybe some medicine. Only sometimes though. Not because he was being rude, but because people hardly wandered up. It made his life a bit lonely, but he was.... Fine.

Not was. Is. Izuku is completely, utterly, fine.

A roof that sometimes leaked over his head but he's fine.

Food he had to forage himself but he's fine.

Books he had read and reread thousands of times. So many times that the pages are starting to fall out. But it's fine. It's all fine.

At least, that's what he tells himself as he picks pink roses. His finger brushes against a thorn, not enough to bleed, but enough to cause him to frown. The irritation of the slight cut makes him shake his hand out.

He's....fine. Him and his flowers, his books, and the woods around his house.

It's fine.

He wasn't always like this though. When he was young, Izuku lived in a distant town, far from everyone. Unassuming in its plainess, the only highlight of living in such a remote village was the view of All Might's castle. On clear days, the castle would gleam in the sun and cast rainbow patterns across the sky. Izuku always dreamed of living in that castle, protecting others and serving those who needed help.

When the day came that All Might himself announced that he was looking for knights, Izuku had followed the call. Excited, naive, wanting so desperately to learn, his young heart had pulled him forward. The call of adventure was too great for him.

He wanted to be a hero like All Might. Someone who saves.

Izuku never expected to get lost on his journey to the castle.

His innocent scent had attracted the drooling mouths of monsters at night, the mischievous fairies who stole the time and the names of humans, and the sirens who sang sweetly before they bared their fangs. He had thought of only humans that could hurt him on his way to meet All Might, not of the mythical beasts that roamed across the lands.

Luckily, he was rescued. Another thing he never expected, to be rescued by a warlock with an odd sense of humor and a piercing gaze. Who took one look at him, told him he'd never be a knight of All Might, and then proceeded to train him. Sir had been kind, helping Izuku. Housing him, teaching him the ways of the forest. Reprimanding him one moment, but encouraging him the next. Besides his mother and All Might, Izuku had never looked up to adults.

But Sir was different. He was strict but held a kindness that Izuku was unaccustomed to.

Sir was also cursed and that curse slowly withered away his body. Izuku was the only one present at Sir's lonely funeral. The only one left in Sir's lonely home.

Somehow, Izuku had never been able to leave after that. After burying Sir, it felt like Izuku was betraying his memory if he left. Left the home where Sir had helped him so much. To suddenly walk away from the place where he had been raised to be a knight.

Perhaps it was also fear stopping him. Without Sir, could he really succeed in being a knight? Were the calls for knights even still occurring? Did All Might already choose all the future heroes of the land? Izuku didn't know.

He's been here for a year, after all.

The last letter he sent to his mother was lengthy and a month ago. A report that he was okay, training by himself, and that he was (most importantly) alive.

He never got his mother's response but somehow he knew that she had received it. Something told him that she had gotten it.

At least that's what he tells himself while he straightens the roses he had plucked from outside. His finger

Credit to @dazzlesquid

throbs lightly, the cut a white line against his tanned skin.

He's fine.

When Izuku goes out again the sun has set, leaving nothing but a midnight violet sky. A midnight violet *empty* sky. Empty for the fifth day in a row. Izuku frowns at the lack of moon.

Usually the only time that the moon wasn't present was during an eclipse or a new cycle. And unless there is an unrecorded new type of eclipse or there has been a constant "new moon" for the past week, Izuku isn't sure why there hasn't been any signs of the moon. Perhaps he should look in one of Sir's old books and try to find an answer.

For now, it means that he must once again bring the lantern with him outside.

He's not the biggest fan of heading out at night, but Sir had told him this was a way of training himself. Finding something comforting in the dark. Sir had found him, trembling and shivering, protecting a young fawn with his body as wolves menacingly growled around him. Sir had saved him and had helped him, trying again and again to assist Izuku in facing his fear of the night.

It's how Izuku tries to keep the memory of Sir alive even now, by following his teachings.

Yet the moon...his comfort in the darkness of the night....is gone.

He walks with a lighted lantern as quietly as he can past the property line of Sir's house. The night air is crisp with a hint of warmth, a warning to all that winter is slowly coming. The coolness of the night has begun to bleed into the disappearing light of the day. The last winter he had had here, Sir had taught him how to burn sticks in a way that wouldn't cause smoke and taught him how to bargain with fairies who needed lodging. "Nothing is done for free," Sir had sadly told him.

It's one of the things that Izuku never believed. That nothing is done for free. Not everyone expected something returned or received after help was given. It made Izuku wonder who had made Sir believe that. Too bad he never got to ask.

There's not much of a path but Izuku's feet take him along a familiar route. Tickles of grass brush against his ankles and he has to wait for the fireflies to pass before he continues walking.

Sir would have frowned, commented on Izuku's slow pace, but still waited for Izuku to catch up. Like he had always done when Izuku was walking too slowly. The lantern would have been given to Izuku and Sir would have told him to lift it higher. Would've scowled at Izuku's trembling. But then he would have made a joke about the moon and the stars. Tell him that if the moon was made out of cheese, then the stars must be crackers. Izuku would have laughed and Sir would have smiled at him.

Izuku wonders if Sir would make a joke about the lack of moon in the sky.

It's too dark tonight. But Izuku tries his best to find comfort in the dark. Tries to....Tries to....

It's hard to.

Not when his lantern menacingly shines around Izuku angrily. Not when the metal and glass reflecting his flame burns his fingers when he gets too close. Not when the light makes him feel lonelier than usual.

"If only you were here tonight," Izuku whispers. He looks upwards again looking for the moon but knowing somewhere in his heart....he's not talking to the moon. He's talking to Sir. Or the ghost of Sir. Sir, who would have let Izuku walk behind him like a shadow.

Now it feels like Sir is a shadow behind Izuku.

"I just wish...." Izuku says again, seconds away from asking the world once more why Sir was cursed, why he had to leave, why Sir had to pass away with no one but Izuku there to witness, but then he pauses.

Because something is near him. Something alive.

His head whips around, fear tensing through his muscles, his free arm pulling back, prepared to hit something, anything. Protect himself from all terrors of the night.

He looks and-There, in the bushes. He sees.... Something illuminated?

No, something is glowing. Glowing brighter than the flames in Izuku's hand. Izuku shivers and very carefully, slowly, walks hesitantly to the light. Bending slightly, pulling away the obscuring leaves, he peeks down and sees...

A ball? No wait, a slime? But slimes aren't in this color. Slimes are green and pink and they usually run away at the first sight of humans. But this one is a radiant silver with accents of red. This one is sparkling brilliantly.

Izuku cautiously sets his lamp down

and gently strokes the little thing. *Squishy*, Izuku thinks. The glowing thing's light falters before flashing a rosy pink.

Slowly, Izuku continues to pet the little thing. He's still not entirely sure what it is, but it seems harmless. There's a coolness coming off of it and it's soft to the touch, reminding Izuku a bit of rabbit's fur but smoother. He gently rolls the small round creature onto the palm of his hand and lifts it up.

The circular blob shifts around, rolling in Izuku's hand, and then...two bright eyes blink sleepily up at him.

Izuku's breath catches. Huh.

The blob....the creature....has a face. A small cute face that reminds Izuku of a puppy or a kitty.

"What are you?" Izuku asks, his eyes filled with wonder as the small circular blob blinks again and yawns at him. There's an angry looking mark against one side of the creature, as if someone had burned it.

"You're hurt," Izuku says. He slowly stands up and balances the creature against his arm and chest as he picks up his lantern. "Let me help you."

The creature freezes, unsure of what to do, and Izuku doesn't blame them. If he was approached by an unknown, large being, Izuku would feel uneasy. Maybe even terrified. Heck, he did feel something akin to terror when he first entered Sir's forest. He was downright terrified of the magical beasts that he had never seen before and that had approached him menacingly.

But Izuku knows that if he leaves this circular creature alone, then that fear the creature feels would only grow and grow and become all consuming. And Izuku wants to stop that before it happens. Wants to help and protect this small, strange, adorable creature.

The creature then seems to sigh, its cold breath brushing against Izuku's shirt and nuzzles into Izuku's chest. As if to say, *I trust you.*

It's oddly adorable. Izuku's new companion.

The creature sits (stands?) on a pillow, their two large eyes following Izuku as he grabs herbs to make a healing paste. Its position almost reminds Izuku of the stacked rice cakes that his mother made for holidays. It had been a recipe passed down from her mother before she moved across the ocean. Izuku smiles at the memory of his mother pounding the rice with her small hammer, turning the grains into a glutinous mush.

"Mochi, huh?" he says, and faces the creature. "That's what you look like. Holiday mochi. It's a nice name don't you think? Mochi? May I call you that?"

The creature stares up at him, blinking rapidly, the soft glow of its body lighting up the living room. Then, like a firefly, their body begins to flash on and off as if to say *yes I approve of that name*. Izuku laughs. He quickly grinds up the herbs, sniffs, tastes, before scraping some on his fingers.

Mochi flinches when Izuku approaches and a frown appears on its little face. If it had teeth and the ability to speak, Izuku is confident that it would be hissing at him and possibly yelling at him words like *Don't you get close to me human*.

"Easy...easy..." Izuku says softly, "I'm not going to hurt you." He gives a small smile, lifting out the medicine slightly for the squishy orb, for Mochi, to smell.

"You watched every ingredient I placed into this," Izuku says slowly, "and if you want their exact names, I can tell you. I swear on my old mentor's grave that nothing in this will hurt you."

Mochi looks at Izuku warily, before leaning forward and sniffing. It closes their eyes, processing the scents before opening them and turning slightly, showing Izuku its wound as if to say *Well hurry up then, help me*.

Izuku's smile widened. "Thank you."

Has Izuku mentioned that his new companion is strange? Not that that's a bad thing it is just unexpected and odd for Izuku. To go from complete loneliness to having a silent friend he can converse with. Embarrassingly, Izuku's throat begins to feel sore, as if he had gone a long time without talking.

(Knowing him, he probably had).

Mochi is not like any creature Izuku has ever seen in the forest. Soft and squishy, with a tendency to float around and land on Izuku's head. Not to mention a picky eater too (they only ate their eggs scrambled and insisted on noodles for lunch). But Mochi, for all their mysteriousness, is a comforting presence that Izuku never thought he would appreciate. Never thought he would miss either.

They float funnily around Izuku's head, resting on his shoulders in the morning, sleeping in his hair at night. Flashing their glowing body

when they wanted Izuku's attention. Izuku can't help but really like Mochi's... mochi-ness. They're squishy to the touch and will often nuzzle against Izuku's fingers. It's adorable and Izuku can't help but giggle a little at Mochi's antics.

(Mochi sometimes flushes and flashes red when Izuku does.)

Too soon, Mochi picks up on Izuku's...questionable tendencies. How Izuku works late hours into the night, how Izuku remembers to tend to his garden yet forgets to eat, how Izuku would spend hours staring at the hearth, as if trying to see a memory within the burning embers.

Mochi notices it all and quickly tries to help.

They'll fly circles around Izuku's head whenever he forgets to eat, mess his hair up if he forgets to sleep, and plant a gentle kiss against Izuku's forehead, trying to erase the creases whenever Izuku stares too long at the fire.

Mochi is...nice. Just the friend a self-made hermit needs.

Mochi floats over, making Izuku lift up his sleepy head. He's been working late into the night again, mainly because he can't sleep. Sleep...is hard. He'll toss and turn and then finally get up and start tinkering, start writing, start practicing with his blade. Start doing anything until the exhaustion takes him out, letting him sleep awkwardly on his desk. Mochi, hovering worriedly, lands on Izuku's head.

Then, annoyingly and adorably, Mochi begins bouncing on Izuku's head, their small squishy body pressing Izuku's face into his desk.

"Ouch! Mochi! Cut it out!" Izuku says but Mochi, flashing twice, continues to bounce. Izuku pushes his head up, sending Mochi spiraling into the air. They catch themselves mid spin and float, giving Izuku an exasperated look.

Izuku pouts back.

"I could've gotten up by myself you know."

Mochi rolls their eyes as if to say No you wouldn't have. Izuku sighs.

"I get it, I get it," Izuku says, "I'll sleep in my bed tonight." He gives Mochi another annoyed look, "were you trying to help me or did you just want to sleep in my hair?"

Mochi smiles mysteriously, floats forward, and plants a kiss on Izuku's cheek.

Eventually, he tells Mochi.

"I called him Sir."

Izuku tells Mochi while he's working in the garden. It was Sir's garden and after he had passed, Izuku couldn't bear to watch it become decrepit. Not after the time Sir had taken to tend to it every day. Not after Sir had taught Izuku how to sing to the flowers to help them bloom more beautifully.

"He liked jokes but was picky with them. He'd always tell me that I needed to learn how to be funnier and that I was too sensitive to be a knight. But then he'd turn around and say that maybe, that sensitivity wasn't me being a coward, but me being empathetic."

Izuku sighs, brushing his hand over the stiff flower buds.

"He admired the original witches, those who gained power from hard work rather than being born with magical abilities. He even...he even worked with All Might once. Helped him. But that was a long time ago."

(Sir's face had always become distant, the small sparkle of a smile disappearing from his eyes whenever he spoke too much of All Might.)

Izuku sighs. "I could never understand him completely, but I trusted him. And I guess....I'm a bit afraid to work knowing that he's not by my side. It's funny, all I could think about before when I was living with my mother was how much I wanted to be out there, having adventures. I mean, I didn't want to leave my mom but I wanted....wanted just to be free." He laughs sadly to himself.

"Look what freedom got me though," Izuku says, "a cabin in the woods, a mentor who I can never see again, and no one who cares."

Izuku closes his eyes, tilts his head back, and tries to remember Sir's smile. "He told me to follow my dreams but I don't know what my dreams are," Izuku says, "I must seem pretty pathetic to you huh?"

Mochi doesn't say anything, not like they ever did. But Mochi does glow slightly as they float upwards. They drift towards Izuku and softly, very softly, plants a kiss on Izuku's head. As if to say, *I don't think you're pathetic* or *I believe in you Izuku. I believe in your dreams.*

Or maybe even *I care about you Izuku.*

"I'm worried about the moon."

Izuku says, staring up at the once again vacant night sky. Like the night before and, who is he kidding, for the past few weeks, the moon isn't there. It's silvery presence

“Okay.” Shouto recoiled slightly, and Izuku immediately regretted his tone.

“I’m only mentioning it because I care about you. You’re my best friend.”

His words were felt right in the chest, each letter its own separate prickle. “I know, I’m—”

“Besides, after that conversation with your mom, I think it’s a little contradictory to say you were unlucky growing up.” He followed that up with a quick, “I’m sorry.”

Suddenly, he stood up to throw away his empty pork bun wrapper, leaving Izuku with the discomfort of receiving an undeserved apology when one he wanted to give still lingered at the edge of his own lips.

PART III: PHASING UP

The rest of the ride to the campsite was full of tension so thick Izuku’s skin itched as if ants were crawling all over him. Even Kacchan played the role of responsible driver to ease the heavy sense of worry hanging over them. Finally getting to the campsite offered them a bit of reprieve from the tightness of the car.

Shouto magnetically strolled to Ochako’s side to pitch the tent, leaving Izuku and Kacchan to set up the campfire and food.

“So… you and Halfie going out yet?” Kacchan casually dropped while spreading a tablecloth over their picnic bench.

Izuku choked. “Oh my god, Kacchan! I am not having this conversation with you.”

“Get over it, Deku. It’s been obvious since our first year that you two have the hots for each other. Hook up already.”

“We are not having this conversation.” Izuku shook his head in disbelief. “Nope. I can’t believe we are having this conversation right now.”

“Look, let me save you the stress.”

Izuku’s eyes widened. He knew what was coming. He grabbed Kacchan by the collar of his shirt and hissed into the jerk’s face through clenched teeth, “You shut your damn mouth right now.”

He smirked right in his face before cupping his hands around his mouth and yelling, “Hey, Half and Half! Get your ass over here! Deku has something he wants to say!”

“Asshole!” Izuku cried. “You are such an asshole!”

“Oh my god, you suck so bad!” Kacchan whisper-yelled back.

“Did Ochako put you up to this? She did, didn't she? I freaking knew…” As Shouto approached them, Izuku’s tone changed. “Oh, *hey* Shouto.”

Shouto’s eyes bounced suspiciously between him and Kacchan. “You had something to ask me?”

Izuku quickly let Kacchan go and strode up to his crush. “Yeah I… uh…” This was awkward as hell! The last two conversations they shared were riddled with arguments and no sense of closure. Damn Kacchan for pushing him into this! “Did you… see the… weather report this morning? Says it’s going to be hot again tonight.”

“I… did not, but thank you for informing me.”

“I was thinking… since it’s going to be so hot, maybe you and Ochako don’t need to put the rainfly on the tent?” Good save, he praised himself.

“Ah, good point. We’ll leave it off then. Better circulation. Is that all?”

“Yup!”

“Well, okay then.” He shot them one last look of skepticism before making his way back to Ochako.

“What the hell was that about?” Izuku could hear her ask.

Shouto mumbled back. “Not really sure. They wanted to talk about the weather?”

She gave an exasperated sigh and called out to them, “Are you two going to make yourselves useful, or what?”

“Yeah, after I beat this guy up!” Kacchan jumped over to Izuku to put him into a playful headlock.

Izuku wrestled out of it and lightly slugged him back in the stomach. “Not if I beat him first!”

“Shut up!”

“No, you shut up!”

Ochako looked to Shouto and rolled her eyes as the boys roughhoused, zigzagging between the pine trees after each other, competing to declare victory with one last hit. “They’re like children, I swear.”

He smirked back. “It’s kind of endearing.”

Ochako made a big show of yawning and stretching her arms to feign exhaustion as the group finished up dinner.

“Wow, it’s getting pretty late. Time to hit the hay, wouldn’t you say?” she asked Kacchan.

His eyes bounced to her, a piece of a pork cutlet dangling from his lips. “The hell you mean? The sun’s barely down and I’m still eat–”

vanished, as if erased from the world.

“I haven’t seen them in a long time, the moon.”

Mochi looks at Izuku, their little brow creased in confusion. Izuku smiles embarrassedly.

“I mean, it might seem a bit strange that I act so….familiar with the moon. But the moon…they’ve been there for me for such a long time. Whenever I felt scared or lonely, whenever I wished to hear Sir’s voice, I looked at the moon and the moon….it never changes but it does. It goes from crescents to halves. It’s always….always there but now….”

Izuku sighs.

“I miss them and I wish they’d come back but….But what if the moon is also confused? What if they also need time to think? To choose their path in life? What if the moon is like me? If they are then the moon…they deserve that too don’t they? Some time to just think and decide for themselves.”

Izuku closes his eyes.

“It’s the moon's life, no one elses, and I hope they know that.”

Mochi blinks, once, twice, and floats to the top of Izuku’s hair and nuzzles into it.

(And Izuku thinks he hears a very soft *Thank you* from somewhere).

When Izuku wakes up one morning, the sun shining directly on his face, his first thought is to roll over and snuggle his face against Mochi’s squishy body. Only he feels an empty space where his head was supposed to bump into Mochi.

He shuffles his hand around, not feeling the round blob of his friend. He lifts his head up. Nothing but an empty pillow.

“Mochi?” he says sleepily. He sits up, blinks, rubs his eyes. No Mochi.

“Mochi?” he asks again, this time panic seeping into his more awake voice.

No Mochi. *No Mochi…* ***No Mochi…***

Izuku rolls out of his bed, scrambles to his feet, and stumbles out of his bedroom. “Mochi?! Mochi? Mochi where are you?! Mochi!” he hears himself yelling but his heart is beating out of his chest and he almost can’t breathe. He looks down the hallway, searches the ceiling, stares into the dark corners of the house for a small glow. Nothing.

His friend. His companion. His Mochi. *Gone.*

They can’t be gone. They can’t disappear! Not like this! Not this suddenly! Not when Izuku had come to care for them so much! *Not like Sir-!*

“Mochi-?” Izuku skids against the floors about to barrel through his front door head first, no shoes or even socks on, ready to run through the morning sunlight, when he sees someone in his kitchen.

Someone standing and cooking in his kitchen.

A man. A man standing and cooking in his kitchen.

He’s….beautiful. With a silvery glow around him and half white and half red hair. Almost like the moon at first or third quarter.

Wearing Izuku’s clothes.

The man looks up and Izuku’s breath catches at the sight. The man, with piercing star-like eyes and a vivid red scar on his face, stares at Izuku blankly.

“Oh you’re up,” the man says, voice sounding bored, “you have bedhead.” He then turns around and continues cooking. The man is cooking in Izuku’s home like it's the most normal thing in the world. Not only that but the man is cooking and seems to know where all his spices and ingredients are placed.

“I filled the tub with water,” the man suddenly says, “it should be warm by now so why don’t you take a bath. Fix that bedhead of yours. I’m still working on breakfast here. Eggs over easy or scrambled?” the man asks as if asking Izuku what kind of eggs he wants is also the most normal thing in the world.

“Uh….scrambled?” Izuku says, his mouth feeling dry and his mind spinning, adrenaline and worry dribbling away and replaced by utter confusion.

“Good. I can only make scrambled anyway,” the man flashes Izuku a small grin before turning around to continue with his cooking. Awkwardly, Izuku finds himself walking to his bathroom. Sure enough, the tub is filled and the soaps are neatly lined up, arranged in perfect grabbing vicinity.

The whole while Izuku bathes, a bewildered expression is on his face and his mind reels, playing back in slow motion the morning’s strange events. He sits in the tub staring at his naked legs, head slightly hurting as questions spiral in his mind. Who is that man? Who is that man? Why is he in his kitchen? Why did he look so normal in his kitchen? Why is he wearing his clothes? *Where is Mochi?!*

The questions continue to fog Izuku's brain as he dries off, pulls on his work clothes, and stumbles back into the kitchen. Already the table is set with a delicious breakfast. Two sets of scrambled eggs, toast, and a glass of milk.

The man glances at him and an unreadable look takes over his face. Somewhere between worry and....intrigue perhaps? The man then looks down at the food and then back up. "I made the eggs," he says bluntly, "hope they taste good. I might have burned the toast though. Sorry."

Izuku nods and sits down, still too shocked to form answers let alone words. Lifting the toast he crunches down and chews. The bread is a bit burned like the man said but other than that, the breakfast is perfect. The scrambled eggs are tasty, not too salty or peppery.

The man watches him carefully. "Good?" he asks, a hint of worry seeping into his voice. Izuku nods.

"It's delicious, thank you."

The man breathes a sigh of relief.

They eat in silence, Izuku taking careful, small bites, and sneaking occasional peeks at the man.

Now that he has found a moment to collect himself, Izuku can see that his first impression of the man wasn't wrong. The man is truly beautiful. His hair is a bit on the long side and there's a heated scar that paints the side of his face. This man was in his kitchen...making him food...acting domestic with him. With lonely forgotten Izuku. The thought makes Izuku blush.

When Izuku finishes his meal (he even drinks all his milk after a quick frown and a pointed look from the man seemed to say You need calcium) he knows that the silence can't go on forever and it's high time the man answers some of Izuku's questions.

"Who are you anyway?" Izuku asks, "Did I summon you by accident last night?" It wouldn't be the first time his sleepy state had summoned something.

To Izuku's surprise, the man blushes, "No I was...uh..." he stumbles in his words and Izuku can't help but feel his heart flutter when he does. So, even a man like him can get nervous too. "Well...it might be easier to show you," the man finally says.

The man stands and slowly, a soft glow encompasses his body. Izuku watches entranced as the man's whole body turns a silvery hue before the figure shudders in circular folds (like a rock disturbing a lake's surface) before suddenly shrinking down, smaller and smaller, into-

"Mochi?!"

Izuku is a bit embarrassed by the yell that rips its way out of his throat. But who can blame him? Because the man is now Mochi and Mochi is blinking their sleepy, large eyes at him from a small, spherical familiar body.

Mochi has the audacity to wink at him.

"Ah- but you- huh- what- how Mochi?!" is all Izuku can say.

Mochi then yawns, floats and kisses Izuku's head before transforming back into the man, floating over their kitchen table.

"Surprise," the man says with a blank expression on his face. But there's a slight lightness, a hint of a smile, as if he is teasing Izuku.

Izuku stares, his mouth hanging open.

"I suppose it's time I tell you who I am."

"You think?" Izuku says, his voice squeaking out in a mix of sarcasm and panic.

"Can you move these?" the man asks, gesturing to Izuku's empty plate and Izuku hastily pushes them aside, too shocked to say anything but follow. The man smiles, sits, crosses his leg, and seems to pose in front of the shocked Izuku.

"My name is Shouto," the man says, "I'm the god of the moon. It's nice to officially meet you, Izuku."

"The...moon?" Izuku repeats, "the moon...." Suddenly, Izuku feels his head explode like a star being pulled down to earth.

"Wait the moon?!" he squacks, "the moon?! As in the moon hanging in the sky?! That moon? You're *the* moon?"

Shouto's eyes twinkle. "Yup," he says, popping the word, "that one. Sorry about my long hiatus. Didn't mean to make you worry."

Shouto then leans in closer, "I know that you were quite worried Izuku," he says, annunciating Izuku's name and Izuku lets out the sound a dormouse would make when escaping a cat.

The grin shifts on Shouto's face, becoming smaller and softer and it makes Izuku feel like he's melted mochi (the food not his companion who was *apparently the freaking moon god!*)

"It is your worried nature that

helped me though," Shouto says, "I don't know if you realize Izuku, but it was you being worried about another being all those nights ago that helped me. You nursed me, fed me, allowed me to stay with you. And in turn, you truly made me feel healthy and worthy enough to be me again. But I have to say," Shouto says slyly, "you do worry a little too much."

Izuku squeaks.

"You're worried about forgetting your teacher. Worry about your mother. You worry so much and I'd like to bear some of that worry. Both as thanks and as…." the slyness in Shouto's stance seems to slip away, replaced by *shyness* of all things, "as an offer of my affections."

In the silence that follows Izuku swears he can hear a crow comically flying overhead and cawing.

"What?" Izuku says.

"Consider this my first step in courting you," Shouto answers smoothly.

"WHAT?!"

Izuku stands up, hands flapping, before his arms wrap around his head in some sort of cacoon like protection.

"Courting me?" Izuku says, "me? Me? Me?!" Izuku gapes again, "You want to court me?! But-? You-? Me-?"

"Is that…no good? I do know it is strange to converse with someone like me. Someone who's seen so much of you and has been with you for so long. But I guess you have never seen this other 'me' so I understand you might not like it. In fact, the more that I think about it, it seems as though I have been tricking you." A somewhat conflicted expression takes over Shouto's face. "I can leave if you want."

"I-! No! I mean! I don't know? This is all happening so fast and-and," Izuku's muffled voice vibrates panickedly, "and you were Mochi and are Mochi but not Mochi and now Mochi looks like you! And you're the Moon and um-!"

Izuku splutters, eyes darting everywhere around the house.

"Breathe, Izuku. Take a deep breath please," Shouto says calmly, though he also sounds a bit panicked himself.

Izuku closes his eyes, steadying his breath. The half warm and half chilled palms of Shouto touch his hands and Izuku can't help but grip onto them and keep gripping them as his blushing, bright red face becomes once more exposed to Shouto.

"I'm glad you're okay!" Izuku finally says, "you weren't in the sky for a long time and I was really worried about you Mister Shouto! I mean-Mister Lord of the Moon Shouto! I-I mean, Your Lordship Moonshipness!"

Shouto blinks slowly, his expression painfully familiar.

"Thanks," Shouto answers, "also just Shouto is fine. No need for any of those…fancy titles. Now, are *you* okay Izuku?"

"Yeah…I think so. I'm just surprised by it all. Surprised, shocked, everything in between," Izuku mumbles.

"I guess the gods don't normally court humans do they?"

"Not that I know of."

"Interesting," Shouto answers, "I'll keep that in mind. In the meantime, why don't I allow you a moment to think of my interest in you. I don't expect an answer," Shouto says, removing his hands (Izuku almost immediately misses the cool touch), "I know that you like to think things through and I do not mind waiting for you to come up with a plan that you're comfortable with."

Izuku nods dumbly, mutely. His mind still spinning at the…at the…confession.

Shouto sighs. "Well now that you have eaten and I have told you of my feelings, I think it best if I leave," he suddenly says.

All at once, Izuku feels his emotions tilted and flipped upside down. "Wait, you're leaving? So soon? But why?" he asks.

Shouto shuffles awkwardly and looks away from Izuku's curious stare. "It's not polite to stay with someone who is uncomfortable with your presence," he says, "I could not leave before because I was weak but after you helped me and nursed me back to health, I was able to return to this form. But now I believe it is correct for me not to overstay my visit."

"Oh," Izuku answers sadly. Though he can see the logic in Shouto's statement, he still feels a bit sad to be losing "Mochi" after all their time together. He understands that it's strange, but he knows Mochi and by extension knows Shouto so….so…

"I don't mind you staying here a little longer," Izuku says shyly, "It is morning after all, you aren't needed in the sky till later, correct?"

The confused, wide-eyed look Shouto gives him is so….Mochi-like that Izuku can't help but giggle.

"But won't I make you uncomfortable?" Shouto asks, his face turning a light pink, his words lowering to a

surprised whisper.

“I….think I’d feel more uncomfortable being alone,” Izuku confesses.

“I see,” Shouto says, his ‘Mochi’ face slipping and replaced by a poorly masked expression of joy, “I shall stay then.” He begins to glow, as if to return to his smaller form but Izuku stops him with a gentle touch.

“I….would like to spend some time with ‘Shouto’ if that’s possible,” Izuku says, holding Shouto’s hand, “In order to get to know him, I mean, you better. I want to know you better if you intend to court me.”

The hand in Izuku’s warms and Izuku can see a bright, rose-colored blush overtaking Shouto’s face.

“I see….of course then Izuku,” Shouto answers.

Izuku does end up allowing Shouto to court him, letting the moon god pamper him, whisper affectionate secrets into his ear, and walk alongside him across the forest steps. Shouto is there when Izuku picks up his sword again, not to practice but to train for his dream once more.

He’s there when Izuku locks up Sir’s home and ties the key around his neck. He’s there helping Izuku set up the barrier to hide the special cottage.

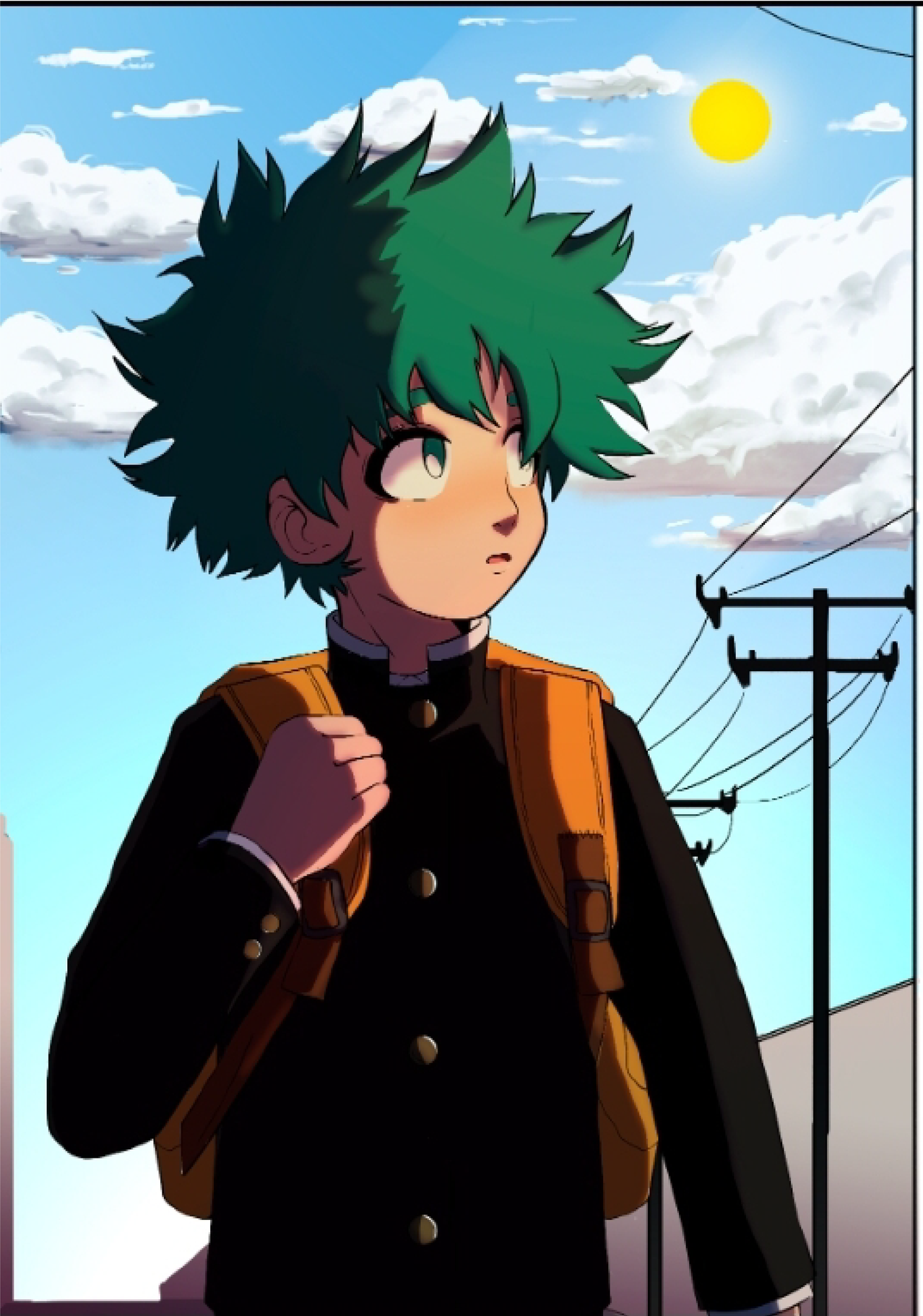
He’s there, next to Izuku, when they pay their respects to Sir’s grave. He holds Izuku’s hand as they walk back to the main road.

Though he has to leave at night, Shouto is always there, shining down and watching Izuku from the midnight violet sky.

And Izuku, after delaying his dream time and time again, after meeting Mochi, helping Mochi, being courted by Shouto, finally feels better than “fine”.

No, he feels hope for the first time in a long time. A hope for his future. A hope for his relationship with Shouto. A hope that Sir’s memory would not be forgotten. A hope to see his mother once again.

And a hope that the loneliness he hated but never spoke of would always be chased away by the shy kiss Shouto plants on his head every morning he wakes up.



Credit to @coloursdraws

Rowing Dreams

Written by: majesticanna

In collaboration with Altered_Karma

★ ★ ★

A boy who had none
Asked for protection in the night
As he rowed through the winding valleys
Of a water marked town
He could only offer the song
Nestled deep in his heart

Rowing dreams of days long past
The extremities of her fingertips
Of soft hands carding through his hair
And singing a melody; not one of sadness
But of motherly protection

When he sings the song from his memories
The tune becomes mournful,
dreams shimmer and break
For they were never strong in the first place

The Moon God heard his laments
Enraptured by the longing
Of a boy who has never had enough love
To watch over his nighttime

The moon knew he could never
Reach down and take the boy away
But still he wished
To protect the heart of his weary soul

The boy sang secrets he can't speak
But through his lips, pour
Grief and mourning and pain
Voice cracking, and wishing for release

The Moon could only offer
Gleaming water whispering promises
Of protection and safety
Wishing he knew the words to free the boy's heart
He watches over his nightly path
And hopes they one day may meet

faro notturno

Written by: Altered_Karma

In collaboration with majesticanna

★ ★ ★

Shouto watches, patiently impatient, as the last light goes off above him. The canals are quiet now, mellow and still as they never are in the day, and not a soul lingers in sight. Every night like this, peaceful and unbroken, is a trial of his patience that he just barely passes.

But with the last of the people asleep in their homes, the night belongs to him once more. Him and the moon, hung overhead and observant as always.

He gives the world a moment to settle as he draws in the cooling night air on his way around the waters. Ancient roads aren't big enough for modern cars, only scooters, so he makes his living transporting large shipments at night over water, his barge slow and steadfast and bearing a history of thousands of years. It's a quiet job, peaceful, and it might even be lonely if not for the company of the moon as it journeys through the night sky.

Eventually, the words of one of his mother's well-worn songs spill out of him unbidden, a consequence of habit more than conscious thought. He doesn't think his company minds though - the moon has always been a good listener.

It's a bad day.

There's no other way to put it: Shouto's had a Bad. Day.

He'd received another demand from his father today, one commanding he return to the family and take up the reins of their estate. Shouto had set fire the letter, but scattering the ashes to the wind had done little to alleviate his frustrations.

In any case, he's not quite in the right mindset to pilot a boat through the canals, no matter the still waters and absent winds. He takes a corner too fast, and has to manually push his craft away from the ledge before the rough concrete can score a gash in her side.

His boat is safe, thankfully; safe, but he comes away from it with a bloody

hand. It stings when he tries to grab his oar, and he's just about resigned himself to calling it a night when a drop of water, supernaturally loud in the still night, stops him pulling to shore.

Something like a fish splashing draws his eyes to the water just ahead of him. He sees ripples in the water, which doesn't quite make sense, because fish don't really live in these waters. He sees a slip of green move in the dark waters, but nothing else even though he stares for a long time.

As he's watching, a second splash that sounds closer to the boat, enough that water flicks onto him. The moon's reflection in the water does little to illuminate the area, but when Shouto eventually writes off the noise and goes for his oar, he finds that his hand is unmarked and healed.

There's no scratch, no scar, not even any blood remains.

He prods the previously injured spot for a moment, but when nothing changes he shrugs. He dips it back into the water, and after a moment, murmurs, "Thank you."

There are no more splashes, but for the rest of the night, the moon seems to shine a little brighter.

Things are different from then on, however. Splashing occurs at odd occasions, usually when he's been silent for far too long. Sometimes, in the heart of the night, he'll hear warm laughter like a summer breeze that he can never find the source of, though it always sounds like the same voice.

His boat moves through the waters easier with every night that passes, until he never has a bad night or another accident on the water again. Nights are very rarely clouded or rainy, and even when things are overcast, he can always find some light from the moon when it hangs visible in the sky. He never again feels crushed by the weight of his solitude or the unknown things that dwell in the dark. In fact, Shouto feels rejuvenated whenever he has a chance to bathe in the moonlight; in a way, the moon becomes his own personal sun.

And the strange things aren't just relegated to the dark.
When he sleeps during the day, his rest is unusually undisturbed; where before he might've dreamt of his father or the life he left behind, now he dreams of the cool waters of the canal, of peaceful things that help him remain asleep. He starts feeling much more rested, and he even starts being able to go out in the early mornings and late evenings, because he isn't spending too much time trying to make up for lost sleep. He starts to recognize the people in his town, starts to see what life with other people are really like. He gets to know the baker's daughter, the blacksmith's son.

Perhaps the strangest part of Shouto's new normal, however, is his new companion.

One night, as Shouto was fulfilling his deliveries, guiding his barge raft around the canals, he comes upon an unusual sight. Hovering above the water of the canals is a figure wearing a cloak and hood, legs swung over the edge and dangling just enough in the water to set it rippling.

Shouto can't pick out a face, but as he's rowing past he can tell that the person knows he's there; the hood follows him too well for anything else.

"Evening, oarsman." A masculine voice says, coming from the shadow of the hood.

It's a new moon, so Shouto can't tell where it is, but just knowing that it's up there and watching him settles any fears and strengthens his heart. He answers, "Good evening. Rare that I see anyone out here this late."

The man chuckles. "I was having trouble sleeping." The hood makes a show of taking in the length of Shouto's barge, stopping momentarily on his current load of cargo, before swinging back to where Shouto mans the oars at the back of the boat. "Would it, Would it be too much trouble if I rode with you for a b-bit?"

Shouto hums, but he pulls close enough to the edge that the man clues in before he needs to say a word. The man gracefully scampers aboard, and settles himself near the rear of the boat.

"Thank you so much, Mr. ....?"

"Just Shouto is fine."

Though Shouto still can't see his face, he gets the distinct impression from his voice that the man is smiling. "Then please, call me Deku."

The man is settled behind him and he's so quiet that as Shouto continues on with his deliveries he forgets about his presence entirely. As such, he can hardly be blamed when he opens his mouth, and starts singing.

It's a wordless thing, hardly more than a looping refrain, but it's as familiar to him as anything, his closest companion aside from his boat and the moon out on these waters. He quickly loses himself to the melody

and the movement of the oars in his grasp, and only as he nears one side of town does the song finally leave him.

Applause meets him as his voice finally fades out, and only then does he remember Deku.

He tries to keep the blush off of his face as Deku's hands finally fall back into his lap. "I believe I've heard that song before."

Shouto feels compelled to explain himself, just a little. "It's lonely at night, so I just... try to keep myself company."

The man hums, and Shouto suddenly wishes he didn't seem so intent on keeping his face hidden. "You have a lovely voice. Full and clear. I hope I can hear it again."

Shouto's face lights up, he can feel it light up, but the boat rocks before he can recover, and he only manages to see Deku striding into the alleys, swallowed by the night once more. Shouto hopes the man finds some rest.

Deku begins showing up regularly, far apart but nonetheless consistent, and as the moon waxes and wanes month after month, he finds himself enjoying his mellow company more and more. He learns more songs and regales his new companion with them whenever Deku finds his way to Shouto's shore. Soon their rare nights together are filled with easy conversation.

"What's your favorite flower?" Shouto frowns, and thinks back on a childhood bereft of anything so delicate as flowers. "I've never been especially particular, but my mother loved lilies." She always smelled like them, in any case.

"Lilies are good!" Deku's voice sounds bright with a grin, the sort Shouto imagines would be blinding. "I'm partial to sunflowers, but then, I love just about everything."

They meander through light topics, foods, places they've visited, festivals they've seen. They never stray into the heavier topics, and Shouto thinks that it's only Deku's sensitivity whenever they veer towards the topic of family that keeps the man in his good graces.

One night, when the sky seems especially dark and the silence around them is comfortable, Shouto starts admiring the cloak his companion has never once been without. In the occasional lights from the houses around them, the deep greens flicker with secretive colors, and the light catches in the subtle silver embroidery that hems and arcs through the hood, until the whole thing appears animated with fire and life. Shouto has yet to see beneath it, but he understands the need to hide better than anyone, and never presses.

Even though he's starting to want to.

"Something on your mind?" Deku asks him, a smile evident in his voice.

Can I see you in the daytime? I'd like to see you with sunlight dancing across your face, and get to know you in the honest light of day. It's not the sort of thing to ask, so he dodges with, "Hmm. Wondering whether I shouldn't get something like your cloak for myself."

Deku's head ducks. "Ah. Got something to hide?"

Shouto's hand drifts to where his bangs hang in front of his face. "More like someone to hide *from*."

Deku hums, and says nothing. Which is a relief, because Shouto doesn't know how he might respond. They continue in silence for a time, all words and songs fled from Shouto's head as he focuses on his delivery, when his companion speaks up once more. "Do you know the Red Baron song? I heard it a few days ago, but the words escape me now."

Shouto takes the olive branch with perhaps a bit too much relief; no sense in dragging Deku into his family drama.

It's on one of his increasingly frequent daytime forays into town that Shouto has a heart-stoppingly close call.

He's stopped by the market to grab some breakfast, watching as the people mill about, socialize, and head on their ways with friendly smiles and warm laughter. It had once seemed like such a different world, when he first arrived, but now they include him, laugh with him, ask about his nights, occasionally even ask him over to share a meal.

It's a totally different way of living, both to what he'd experienced under his father's thumb and from what his life had been like when he'd first come to live here. It's... nice.

Or at least, it is, until he sees a flash of unmistakable red above the crowd. And then there's nothing nice about the open air market and the people milling towards their homes.

Todoroki Enji turns towards him, and their eyes meet.

He's not supposed to be here-

A hand seizes his wrist, and Shouto is yanked into a back alley before his panic can truly set in.

"*Shouto*!"

Shouto's feet struggle to keep pace with the person guiding him through the rough cobbled streets. When he finally gains his balance agan, he tries to identify his- kidnapper? Assailant? Savior?

It's Deku, with his familiar dark green hood and embellishing silver in place.

All too soon they find themselves on the steps of a small temple, nestled into a copse of trees, with ivy crawling into the smooth, white marble and flowers abundantly strewn across the grounds. It all seems so natural, but there's a feeling of careful cultivation in everything, that betrays the empty appearance of the temple.

There doesn't seem to be anyone present, not even any priests, but Shouto's friend strides in like he belongs there. Shouto stops at the threshold, wary of this unknown god.

"Shouto?"

"Whose temple is this? And-" *Who are you?*

"You'll be safe here. I-" His hood swings towards the wall. "I have to go. But you can stay here as long as you need to. Until that man goes away. He- He won't find you here."

"But-" *Where is here*, he'd like to ask, but Deku is sweeping into the depths of the temple before he can draw the breath to ask.

Shouto must stand there for several minutes, just staring blankly into space, before he decides to just go along with it. He had gotten away from Enji, and that's all that really matters. Shouto'll have to remember to thank him later, maybe buy him a bouquet of sunflowers.

There's a marble edifice carved into the wall opposite of the open-air entrance. The firelight of the torches flicker over its surface, so that it's hard to make out the image from a distance. He draws closer, and shivers a bit when he steps into the shadowed part of the room.

Overhead, the ceiling opens up into the sky, and metal implements arc across it. Shouto recognizes some shapes as constellations, and follows them down to the pillars that depict their stories. Orion the Hunter, locked in his eternal battle with Scorpio, Aries spiriting Phrixus and Helle to safety, and the Gemini twins guiding sailors like Shouto to safety, all painstakingly etched into the marble of this mysterious temple.

As he looks around, stories his mother told him drift back, wrapped in a bittersweet nostalgia that Shouto rarely allows himself to indulge in.

There's one legend he doesn't recognize from his mother's bedtime stories. The central implement, which leads down to the large edifice at the heart of the temple, depicts an older man haloed by the sun reaching down to a young man. The sun-man has a crown of wavy hair and simple clothing, but embedded in place of his face is a crystal that, during the day time, Shouto is sure refracts the light magnificently.

It is his companion who truly captures Shouto's eye, however, and who also seems to be the true focus of this temple if the size of his depiction is anything to go by. The younger man is covered in moon motifs; crescent moons hang from his ears, half moons form wings behind him, like the wings of a butterfly, and his face is hidden by a full moon opal. Stars spill from his skirts and his hands, and around him the seas part and splash, in motion even in the still image on the wall.

It's clear that this is the temple's patron god, this man of the moon.

A small stone tablet carved with words lies at the base of the wall. The image of the god looms larger than life as Shouto moves closer to read it.

"And thus the moon god Izuku doth reflect the good of a soul, and in him one can see the good in themselves, free to dream as they please, for he delights in the sweetness of their dreams, and protects those who rest under his light. For those that he cannot protect in sleep, he guides the stars in their nightly dance, for the night is not the time for solitude, and Izuku would see all those who labor or long for company.

Hail to Izuku, god of the moon, lord of the night, son of the Sun, he who watches and guides the stars in their nightly parade, whose hand is the soil in which life grows, and whose heart is in every song."

"Izuku..." Shouto breathes. His arrival was so abrupt that he has nothing to offer, so all he can give to the offerings bowl are his thoughts and prayers.

Deku's word holds true; Shouto waits until long after dark to venture out of the sanctuary, and in all that time Enji never shows up.

Deku doesn't reappear during his daytime strolls, though, and Shouto finds himself worrying each and every night, until the man returns on his usual, once-a-month evening,

like he hadn’t broken their unspoken promise of nighttime only visits. He does start the conversation a bit more eagerly than usual, which is saying something.

“You haven’t gone back to the shrine?”

It’s true; Shouto hasn’t gone back. He can’t say if it’s for guilt or something else. Shouto shrugs. “I would feel bad when I have so little to offer. Lord Izuku doesn’t seem the type to accept gold, and I have few worldly possessions to give as thanks.”

Deku hums. "I suppose you don't need to visit the shrine. You're still out here singing every night, after all."

"And that counts, does it?"

"To the moon? I'm sure it does."

They ride in silence broken only by Shouto's humming. He doesn't break out into full song because that thing that seems to hover on the back of Deku's tongue is there again, and Shouto wants to hear what he has to say. He wants the other man to stop holding back; maybe it'd help him not hold back too.

He knows his patience will yield something one of these nights.

And it seems that tonight is his lucky night. "That man, his hair was just as yours," Deku notes quietly.

Shouto snorts, what a delicate way to start this. He does genuinely appreciate the caution, though. "It would be, given that he's my father."

"And yet you looked terrified in that marketplace."

"He was never a very *good* father, if you know what I mean."

“I see...”

Those words hover again, gravity enough to pull the stars from the sky, and Shouto suddenly realizes he can’t let tonight end without getting something answered; there are too many unknowns, now, and this man is coming to possess too large a part of Shouto’s heart for him to keep his peace any longer. “Why do you visit me?”

It isn’t what he wanted to ask, not at all, but with the words lingering in that heavy air he realizes it’s the only thing that matters. Who Deku is, the mystery of his face or origin, doesn’t matter nearly so much if Shouto doesn’t understand *why* he’s here. Why he’s chosen Shouto, why he spends so many nights with him, even if it’s only once a month. Why he keeps coming back.

Everything else can come later.

Deku’s hood shifts upwards, almost to the point where moonlight can leak into its deep shadows. It’s the closest Shouto thinks he’s ever come to seeing the other man’s face, and it almost feels like a sign of trust. “I heard you singing and got curious.”

“And that’s supposed to explain why you keep coming back?” Because it doesn’t feel like any explanation at all. “You work at that temple, right? Did someone put you up to this?”

Wordlessly, the hood shifts from side to side.

“So I’m to believe that merely my voice and a brief conversation are what brings you to my boat without fail?”

His companion’s voice is wry when he speaks again, but there’s an underlying tremor to it that tells Shouto more than Deku likely wants him to know; this is a boundary that Deku has been carefully trodding as well, and he’s just as eager as he is nervous to see it crossed. Shouto finds that he feels much the same. “I do only come once a month.”

Ah, yes. And were Shouto any regular unobservant fool, that excuse might have worked. “Why keep it at all, this once a month appointment? And don’t think,” he says, pointing a finger skyward to the uninterrupted blanket of night, where the moon surely lies hidden in its monthly shadow, “that I haven’t noticed a pattern to your visits.”

Deku’s shoulders slump. “I should have known you were too smart to miss that.” He starts muttering to himself, too low for Shouto to make out the words. When he doesn't move to leave the boat, however, Shouto continues about his nightly duties.

When an hour has gone by, Deku rises from his seat. Shouto unconsciously begins steering the boat for the nearest landing spot.

Instead of disembarking, however, Deku remains aboard, staring down at him through the shadows of his hood and the night. Shouto stares back, and the moment stretches beyond time as they wait for the other to move.

And then, Deku sits back down.

He lowers his hood, strips the cloak from his shoulders, and stares Shouto unambiguously in the eye.

He’s *beautiful*, Shouto thinks almost without meaning to. His skin is smooth without blemish, dotted by the faintest marks of sunlight. His cheeks are round and soft, glowing even in spite of the low light of midnight, and the riotous curls frame

them in a way that might look deliberately styled that way if not for the long hours Deku's already spent on his boat with that hood up; no way that handsome mess could be anything other than natural.

He's also, strikingly, very familiar. Not in the face, but in the way his hair bleeds out into the night, and his toned body, which is garbed in a simple T-shirt and shorts that nevertheless appear far nicer than any of the townsfolk, looks as though it might've been carved from the marble that made the temple, if marble could be given life.

"I'm not- It wasn't-" Deku inhales deeply and begins again. "Do you even know who I am?"

"Deku." Because, whoever else he might be, Shouto has known this man nearly two years now, the month-long gaps a minor inconvenience to their acquaintanceship. "And also, maybe the man carved into the edifice of that temple you took me to."

His companion huffs. "Alright. And that would mean...?"

"That... Hm." So, his companion Deku is the moon God Izuku. But, why would a god spend so many nights keeping him company? There must be another explanation, one that can reconcile having a full temple that that doesn't imply a full and powerful god has been keeping him company for years now, but Shouto's drawing a blank. It might be disbelief that has him voicing his hypothesis aloud. "That would mean... you're a god?"

"Yes." And before Shouto's eyes Deku seems to grow without ever changing size, his presence a beacon in the night where once it was but a murmur. Nothing really changes, but now Shouto's doubts are nonexistent with one so clearly divine before him. The unfurling aura feels like a pair of wings, swooping out to envelop the world in a protective embrace, and the words of the temple drift back to mind.

"Lord Izuku."

The god deflates a bit, drawing that aura back into himself. "None of that, please. I'm, *we're*, not supposed to reveal ourselves to mortals in general, but now that I have, I refuse to let anything change. I am no more than you, down here on the streets."

Shouto snorts; a humble god? Will wonders never cease? But it gives him some measure of peace, that his friend doesn't wish to hold power over him in spite of his literal entitlement to it. "That's good to hear." Shouto winces; perhaps that was a bit too bland of a response?

But the god only smiles at him. "I suppose it is." De-*Izuku's* head snaps upwards, towards the east, where the first signs of dawn can be seen breaching the horizon. "My time is up. But-"

"I will be here next month, as always, L- Izuku."

But, instead of leaving and disappearing as he usually does, Izuku just stares at him. Shouto is about to ask him what's wrong, as the sky is most definitely shifting into early morning, when the god lurches and places a chaste but warm kiss on Shouto's forehead, before swanning away into the city.

"You are my favored, Shouto."

Shouto's forehead burns that day, well past midday.

Izuku is bashful when he next shows up, hood pulled back into place, and greets Shouto with a kiss to his hand and a question in his eyes.

Their relationship grows in that way, stolen moments and limited visits, but the moon overhead every other night of the month means that Shouto never actually feels alone. The first time either of them dare to share a kiss, they spend the rest of the night sitting awkwardly side by side on Shouto's boat, till the flow of the canals nearly drags them out into the bay.

They grow more confident and more comfortable, and soon their greetings shift from words to kisses, soft and silken as a lily's petal and a million times stronger than stone.

Izuku never stays past dawn, but Shouto finds a family of turtledoves nesting in his room's windowsill one day, and the friendliness with which they treat him from the start tells Shouto that they are a gift of companionship from Izuku, to supplement his own absence.

Which is why, contemplating the moon one night, Shouto has to ask in return:

"Doesn't it get lonely up there?" Shouto asks early one morning, as he sails the waters that slowly reflect the lightening sky. The moon hangs heavy overhead, waxing to its zenith, and the occasional puffs of wind feel like kisses on his brow.

The ripples on the water still for a moment, a sign that Izuku is listening, before swelling anew.

Shouto is still learning to interpret them, but he thinks this means that the god is flustered, and denying it. Denial doesn't mean anything

though, and after a lifetime of it Shouto knows solitude when he sees it. He presses his lips to his fingers, and then his fingers to the reflection of the moon in the water, before continuing on with his night.

When Izuku next visits him, the moon an invisible body in the sky, he surges into Shouto's embrace and kisses him fervently, everywhere he can manage on Shouto's face, far more passionately than anything they've done until now. Shouto's head burns when he presses their foreheads together, and never has he believed more that he holds a god in his arms than when he gazes into Izuku's warm, glowing gaze, his freckles dots of starlight on his cheeks and nose. "I will never be alone, so long as you continue to sing for me, my songbird."

It's an easy enough promise to make, and easier to keep, and for the years to come, Shouto's voice echoes the dark waters and night streets of town, a night beacon to those who spend their restless nights out of doors. Occasionally a second voice will join him, buoyed by the wind, toned with a timbre of the sweetest honey, and all who sleep ill at ease find their nights all the better for their song.

It passes into urban legend, of the moon and his nighttime lover, a simple rower who sings songs of safety and love, who rows the canals at night and guides lost lovers and children home. Those who find themselves struggling in the waters of the sea will find themselves guided by the tide into a raft, and taken to safety, and until the end of time will their voices protect the waters of town.

Bound in Their Eclipse

Written by: SummberBummin

Content Warning: Angst

★ ★ ★

The sun and moon are immortal beings, but they are not eternal. Billions of years from now, the moon will drift out of orbit and the sun will collapse. They can be wounded and they can die, just like the humans they watch over.

Their mortality is why each sun and moon have successors. The chosen are guided by their predecessors, shown how to control their power, and taught the duties and traditions they must uphold.

A new successor is a joyous time. A renewal of life! But... there was none of that in this circumstance.

A rogue belt of asteroids collided with the planets in Earth's orbit, shaking the very foundations of the Milky Way galaxy.

The moon, Mirai, was killed. The sun, Toshinori, injured beyond repair.

Power shifted too fast, too soon. As grimness and grief spread over the solar system, a power hungry father seized the mantle of the moon for his chosen son, and a weary mentor passed along his power to a favored student who was nowhere near ready.

"Midoriya Izuku and Todoroki Shouto are our new sun and moon," Nedzu announced, sitting at the head of the Zodiac council.

The other constellations bore grim faces at the news, none of them pleased. But, there was nothing they could do about it; they'd just have to adapt the best they could.

"I know this is sudden," Nedzu continued on, "but I believe them to be worthy of the powers prematurely thrusted upon them. Shouto is the son of the planet Mars, Todoroki Enji, and his wife, the minor moon Phobos. Being Earth's next moon is in his blood."

Murmurs of agreement sounded through the chamber, but were then halted when Kayama, the scorpion herself, brought up a criticism.

"But what about Midoriya Izuku? He

was only a dwarf star before Toshinori passed his power onto him. Todoroki Shouto may be qualified to be our moon, but Midoriya…" her long nails clacked against the marble table as she pursed her ruby red lips, considering. "He was only chosen because Toshinori favored him. Not because of any qualifications."

"That is a cause for concern." Nedzu agreed, bobbing his head obligingly. "But Toshinori tells me this boy has the spirit of a sun, as well as a noble heart. We could use more heart in these trying times."

"That's all well and good…" Aizawa, the scales, the balance, drawled. "but we're going to need more than that. The galaxy is vulnerable right now. They need stability after the fall of our pillars. Can we count on these successors to provide that?"

Nedzu smiled, a gleam in his eye. The delicate smile he wore so wickedly betrayed he'd been waiting for someone to ask him that exact question. "I'm glad you asked. For I have a solution."

The twelve constellations leaned forwards in their seats, anticipation glowing in every fiber of their being as they waited with bated breaths.

"Marriage."

Those breaths were loosed in heavy sighs of disappointment. One look around the table told Nedzu most of the other constellations were not impressed— Aizawa noticeably rolled his eyes— but the clever leader had planned for this.

"We will have the new sun and moon marry to send a message— That we are still strong and fortified. That we are changing yes, but for the better. Youth may be seen as inexperienced, but it is also full of zeal. New life, new deities. We will be reborn from the ashes of the tragedy that struck us. In this marriage… we will unite the sky."

That applaud worthy presentation was exactly what was recited to the new sun and moon, not even a quarter of an orbit later.

Todoroki Enji, father of the new moon, Shouto, was immediately on board with the idea when it was presented to the celestial bodies gathered at Nedzu's meeting. "I agree, uniting my son's power," he placed a hand on Shouto's shoulder, and the boy stiffened. "And the power of the new sun…" his eyes swept over Izuku, dark and cold, like a lake encased in ice. Izuku shivered involuntarily, a strange feeling, since he was usually surrounded by so much warmth, " …would be extremely beneficial for us."

The moon didn't say anything to support his father, nor anything against. He only stayed stiff and silent.

Before the meeting had been called, Izuku had only seen Shouto from a distance; he'd never actually met him face to face. He'd met the previous moon, Mirai, due to his close relationship with Toshinori, but the man had never seemed to like him.

Even so, Izuku had still cried his eyes out when he'd heard the news of his death. His mentor, however, hadn't shed a single tear, but Izuku knew how much grief had befallen him, striking a blow perhaps even more damaging than the physical wound itself.

Toshinori had come with Izuku today, his presence much welcome in the face of this daunting proposal. *Stars*, they wanted him to marry the moon?

It wasn't like Shouto wasn't attractive. In fact he was downright gorgeous, with his long red and white hair, pulled back in a complicated updo that framed his round face, accenting regal features. The one aspect that kept him from being the portrait of perfect beauty… was the scar marring the left side of his face. Not that it turned Izuku off of him in any way— his own body had its fair share of scars, he wouldn't judge Shouto for his.

Izuku realized he'd been staring when Shouto's gaze caught his, the storm and sea of his eyes making Izuku's breath hitch. Heat flooded his face, and with a rapid jerk of his head, he turned his attention back on the Zodiac council.

The other constellations were voicing their own opinion on the marriage plan, pitching in their two cents. *Strength, Stability, Unity.* The hall seemed to be an echo chamber of those three words.

"You have built an excellent case, Nedzu," Toshinori complemented. "Your argument is very convincing and your points are well founded. But, it's not me who you have to convince." He laid a hand on Izuku's shoulder, and Izuku leaned into the comforting touch, so opposed to the tense posture the moon had developed when his father had done the very same action earlier. "What are your thoughts, my boy?"

All eyes turning on him, Izuku swallowed thickly. "I— I um…" Overly aware of the sweat gathering on the back of his neck, Izuku knew he held the attention of the room, and consequently, his fate. Said fate hinged on how, exactly, he phrased his next

words; as did the audience's attention, soon to turn impatient. He took a deep breath, and stepped forwards. “I realize how important it is to show a strong united front, being major deities and all... but...” he trailed off biting his lower lip.

Izuku didn’t particularly *want* to marry someone he didn’t know, but with Mirai gone and Toshinori injured, the galaxy was scared, vulnerable, uncertain how to proceed. They needed something to show them that life would go on. This... this was his duty. He was the sun now. Objecting to this plan would only put more strain on his mentor’s already bent back.

“I need to know the moon is okay with it too.” Izuku felt those piercing dual colored eyes on him, like two pin pricks poised above his skin, but he didn’t dare tear his gaze away from the council. “We... we’d be *married*. That’s something that will impact the rest of our days. It’s a *big* decision and I don’t want to pressure him into a marriage with me, but if he...” The hands he’d been nervously wringing, now curled over his chest as he risked a too-quick glance at Shouto, unable to make out anything of his expression, “f-finds me agreeable, I will marry him. For all our sakes.”

Izuku turned to look completely at the moon. He’d been half hidden by his father’s form, but now, he was fully on display. Shouto was dressed as formally as Izuku, but he didn’t look out of his element, much like how Izuku felt, twitching in the stuffy, fancy fabric.

The fine clothing Shouto wore covered nearly everything but his face. The high collar buttoned all the way up to his throat, his trousers high waisted and his knee length boots so polished, a scuff wouldn’t dare come near them. Izuku was surprised to see that his moon white hands weren’t covered by gloves, the cuffs of his coat fastened securely around his wrists. Izuku wondered if he could actually breathe underneath all those layers.

Shouto opened his mouth to reply, but was beaten to the punch by his father.

“Yes. Shouto will partake in this marriage.”

Izuku frowned. He’d asked Shouto, not his father. Todoroki Enji wasn’t the one being married off. It was Shouto’s opinion that mattered to him. Since Izuku had already agreed, the marriage was ultimately Shouto’s decision to make.

Not wanting to disrespect Enji in front of the council, Izuku didn’t say anything, instead shuffling uncomfortably on his feet. But a stubborn part of him urged to call the man out.

Luckily, he didn’t have to.

“I think the new moon should have a say,” Aizawa said, his words crisp and clear even with the lower half of his face buried underneath that, long, winding scarf. The same scarf that acted as the rope that held the golden scales. “Not his father.”

A blink was the only reaction Shouto displayed. The silence stretched on as the collective party waited on his answer. Shouto cleared his throat, almost awkwardly, as if he was thrown off that they were actually including him in the conversation at all, rather than letting his father do all the talking.

“I’ll think about it.”

It wasn’t an agreement, but it wasn’t a dismissal either. Izuku knew he should feel relieved that the decision wouldn’t be made right this second, yet... he couldn’t help the curl of disappointment that twisted in his stomach. Until Shouto made a decision, he’d been left pondering the unknown. If they didn’t marry, how else would they help repair the cracks that had spread throughout the galaxy?

And if they did marry...

“Then we will await your answer,” Nedzu said, his beady eyes trained on the blank faced moon. “But please, make it swiftly. The fate of our universe depends on you.”

Shouto nodded, the barest dip of his head. Then his father grasped him by the arm and walked him out of the room. Even under all those layers, Izuku didn’t miss the rigidness of the father and son’s backs as the wide, ornate double doors swung shut behind them.

The meeting was then brought to a close, Izuku and Toshinori returning home to the solar court.

Once they reached the intersection of halls where they’d part to go their separate ways, Izuku turned to Toshinori to make his goodbyes, but was pulled into a crushing hug before he could.

“My boy, I... I am so proud of you.” The bony arms tightened around Izuku, the hand on the nape of his neck pulling him closer into the wisp of warmth his predecessor still held. “You handled yourself incredibly in front of the council, you spoke true and from the heart. I couldn’t be happier to have you as my successor.”

Tears sprang to life in his eyes, leaking down his sun spot covered cheeks. “I— I was just trying to be strong, like you.”

“You were more than strong, Izuku. You were kind and compassionate and so *brave.*” Toshinori pulled back, then chuckled as he saw the tears.

Izuku wiped at his eyes, already starting to apologize for being a crybaby. “I’m sorry, I—”

“No, it’s alright.” Toshinori shook his head, laying a hand atop Izuku’s messy curls. “Today has been a bit emotionally taxing. Why don’t you head to bed and we can talk about all this in the morning, okay?”

“O-okay.” Izuku agreed, still sniffling as he departed.

That next morning, before he even got the chance to talk to Toshinori, a letter arrived at the solar court, informing them that Shouto had agreed to the marriage and to put preparations in motion, for the ceremony would take place during the next eclipse.

As soon as they arrived at the lunar court, Shouto fully intended to go straight to his chambers and sleep forever, but his path was blocked by his father.

The man was so large he nearly took up the entire entry way, his staggering height giving his ego a run for its money.

Shouto exhaled sharply through his nose, then tried to duck around his father only to be stopped by a meaty arm.

“Shouto.”

The moon was already rolling his eyes at the lecturing tone.

“You must marry the new sun to obtain his power.” His father had never given up on his quest for power, having been passed up in favor of Toshinori Yagi for the mantle of the sun decades ago. It was safe to say he was still bitter.

“I don’t want to talk about that right now,” Shouto bit out through gritted teeth, once again trying to get past his father. “I’m tired. And if you want us to even attempt to have a civil conversation about this, you’ll let me go to sleep.”

He managed to dodge the arm this time, the movement having been a bit slower, as if his father had realized just how agitated his son was in the current moment. Anyone in the lunar court could attest to how foul Shouto’s behavior could be when he needed rest.

Shouto didn’t waste the opportunity, walking as fast as he could without flat out running and ignoring his father’s barked words at his back. He turned the corner, out of his father’s line of sight, and slipped into his room.

As soon as the door was closed his shoulders slumped from the exhaustion that had been piling high on them.

“Gods above,” Shouto cursed, rubbing a hand over his face. They wanted him to marry the sun. His father wanted him to marry the sun. *How was he supposed to get out of this?*

He had no answer. So, he started to undress, kicking off his boots and shedding layer after layer until he was in his underclothes. Shouto didn’t bother to change into clean sleepwear, trudging to his bed and collapsing into it as soon as he got close enough.

What was he going to do? Marry someone he’d never met? Say no to the entire universe?

He groaned into his pillow. Deciding that his problems were too much to think about and that he should avoid them by sleeping, he tugged on his duvet until it was over his head and he couldn’t see anything of the troublesome world beyond. Shouto had always liked to nap away his problems, had ever since he was a child, and now was no exception. As soon as he closed his eyes, he was out.

The next morning, Shouto was awoken by the sound of his curtains being swept open, the sunlight that streamed through scalding his eyes in an annoying reminder of the current situation weighing on him.

“Good, you're awake.” The voice of his sister, Fuyumi, greeted him.

Shouto grumbled and rolled his back to the brightness. Not ready to face the light of day.

The bed dipped as Fuyumi took a seat on the edge of it, her hand immediately going to smoothen out his bed head. “Oh, Shouto. I can’t believe you’re getting married!”

Any trace of drowsiness he might have had vanished.

“What?” Shouto lurched up, his head nearly slamming against his sister’s as she scooted down the bed to give him space.

“I know! I can’t believe they’re having the ceremony so soon.” She clapped her hands to her cheeks in distress. “The next eclipse isn’t even a whole moon cycle away!”

“Wait, what? There’s a date?” He’d never agreed to the marriage in the

first place, much less a wedding date.

“Yes, Father sent the letter at dawn. He had me read over it.” Fuyumi tilted her head to the side. “Did you not know?” She questioned slowly, her brows lowering.

“No,” Shouto bristled, hugging his knees to his chest. “I hadn’t even agreed to the marriage yet.”

Fuyumi suddenly found the carpet very interesting. “Oh... I- I wasn’t aware.”

“It’s not your fault. You couldn’t have stopped him even if you’d known.” Shouto sighed and stood up, walking to his closet. He pulled on his clothes, but didn’t bother to brush his hair or wash his face before striding out the door.

Of course his father would decide for him. Shouto had never had a choice to begin with. If Todoroki Enji wanted something, he was going to get it, no matter what anyone else had to say.

Well, Shouto was going to give him a piece of his mind, decision or not.

He threw open the doors to his father's study, knowing he’d be there. His father knew that he knew too. He didn’t so much as lift an eyebrow as Shouto stormed in.

Shouto didn’t bother with beating around the bush. His father knew that he knew too. He didn’t so much as lift an eyebrow as Shouto stormed in.

Shouto didn’t bother with beating around the bush. His father knew exactly why he was here.

“I never agreed to marry him!” He shouted.

“Good morning, Shouto.”

His lip curled and he had to remind himself to take a breath, to not explode. Shouto wasn’t going to give his father the excuse to dismiss him as a child throwing a temper tantrum. “You sent that letter without consulting me.”

Sighing, his father set down the papers he’d been reading over. “You said you were tired. So I made the decision for you.”

Red flooded his vision. “It was supposed to be *my* decision!” He yelled, anger bubbling hot in his stomach.

“You had your chance in the council room. They needed an answer swiftly so I gave them one.” His father said simply, as if he hadn’t just married Shouto off for a power he’d been obsessed with for centuries.

Shouto’s fists curled at his sides. His father never took responsibility for his actions, would never take the blame, only put it on someone else. On his mother, on Touya, on Shouto. “You’re not the one getting married! You had no right to—“

“I had every right!” His father roared, his hands slamming down onto the polished desk. “You are *my* son and I will decide what’s best for you!”

“I don’t want to get married! He’s...” Shouto searched for something to say, something to justify his anger to his father in terms he could understand. “He’s a stranger!”

His father took a deep breath, massaging his temples with his middle and fore fingers, like Shouto was the one being irrational. “Shouto, your mother and I had an arranged marriage and—”

“Oh, yeah?” Shouto’s disdainful laugh held no amusement. “Look how well that turned out.”

“Don’t test me, boy.” His father’s gaze turned sharp. Shouto knew that look all too well. The one that told him he’d best watch himself if he didn’t want to end up limping back to his room. “You don’t want to end up like your mother.”

Shouto flinched. He’d wished his father had hit him. Had sent him limping to his room. But, of course his father knew how to wound just as well with his words as he did his fists. Knew where and with what to strike to make it hurt.

“You told me you have a preference for men. The sun is male. So what’s the issue? The boy is decent looking enough.”

His father commenting on a man’s looks was almost enough to make Shouto hysterically huff in disbelief, but any and all amusement had already been drained from him, replaced by a bone deep weariness that made him wish he’d never woken up this morning.

“Just because I favor men doesn’t mean I desire every man I come across,” Shouto explained shortly, crossing his arms over his chest, and tried not to let himself tremble as he glared venomously at the man before him.

If he desired women, his father wouldn’t be asking this question. Not every man was in his tastes. Not that the sun was lacking anything in particular, no, but the whole Zodiac Council and his father wanting Shouto to marry him was a bit of a turn off.

He’d tried not to look at the sun during the meeting, or anyone for that matter, but when the sun had asked for his opinion, his consent, like he genuinely cared, Shouto

couldn't help but stare.

A stranger he might have been, but it was obvious to Shouto who he was.

The sun had cloud-fluffy hair and big hopeful eyes, the kind that hadn't seen pain or suffering like Shouto's had. He was innocent, pure, bright. Just what a sun should be. Nothing like the moon's many dark sides. He didn't know why the Zodiac Council thought it'd be a good idea to marry them; Shouto would just weigh someone like that down with his misery. The sun would be better off without him or the power hungry father-in-law that would come with the marriage.

"Shouto, there is only one sun. You can't be picky," his father huffed.

Picky? That's what his father thought the problem was? Shouto nearly choked on his scoff.

His father's face darkened. Closed off. Done arguing. "We aren't going to debate this any longer. You will marry the sun and you will behave yourself at the ceremony. I don't want to hear anything else about it, understood?"

Hatred. That's what was filling up Shouto's throat like the breath of a dragon. Pure, unfiltered, hatred.

"Understood," he repeated tightly, fists clenching behind his back.

The moon knew not to push. Not when his father could do so much worse. To him. To his mother, who was still locked away, having been banished to her own moon, Phobos. Shouto still hadn't tried to visit her. Not after what had happened.

His scar itched like it was crawling with fire ants as he left his father's study, feeling bruised and burned even though not a single hand had been laid on him.

Shouto made the trek back to his room with leaden feet that only grew heavier with each step. He was right in his earlier conclusion. He'd never had a choice.

The wedding preparations had taken both ages and no time at all. One moment, the seconds were dripping down like molasses, and the next, days had passed in an instant.

Izuku had tried to stay optimistic, even though he hadn't heard a word about Shouto since the morning the letter had come.

Before he knew it, the day of the wedding had reached them, and Izuku found himself sitting in a dressing room inside of a large, colorful tent that had been erected just outside of the eclipse shrine.

On the opposite side of the shrine was the lunar court's own tent, where Shouto was likely being washed and prepped just as Izuku was.

His own bath had taken ages; every inch of his skin had been scrubbed until it was raw by servants he didn't know. Attendants of the temple, he'd been informed when he'd asked who they were. At first he'd balked at strangers bathing him, but they'd insisted it was their job to make sure he was clean when he entered their holy shrine and made his vows.

Now, he was getting dressed in his ceremonial robes, the material silk-like beneath his fingers, but stronger, thicker; cloth made armor. There were so many layers and strings to it that his mother, Midoriya Inko, had come inside to help him, her fingers expertly tying the knots in a way he'd never been able to replicate.

While her hands were steady, her mouth was not. Her lips were a wobbly line as she tried not to burst into tears.

"Oh, Izuku, you're getting married! You're really getting married!" She sniffled, her words elated beneath the oncoming tears.

Izuku held in his wince, instead opting for an awkward chuckle. "Yeah, I am mom."

"Are you nervous?" She asked as she helped him get his arm through one of the drooping sleeves of his robes.

Izuku tried to articulate a reply over the lump that had been forming in his throat, but his mother seemed to pick up on his difficulty and breezed on talking for the both of them. "I was so nervous the day I married your father. And I was wearing these absolutely ridiculous heels, they were so high I thought I was going to snap my ankle walking down the aisle. Thankfully, I didn't, but it was a close call."

Izuku's father had died when he was two, and his mother always got a little sad when she talked about him, so it was nice to hear her talking about their wedding like this.

He also knew his mother talked a lot when she was nervous. So he encouraged her to continue.

"Traditional weddings have their perks, I guess." His toes flexed in his split socks and sandals.

"Oh, yes," his mother eagerly agreed, immediately grasping onto the subject. "Your father and I had a more modern wedding, but the traditional ones are so beautiful. Especially when done on such a grand scale."

For a union of the sun and moon, all

the stops had been pulled out. He'd only gotten a quick glimpse at the eclipse shrine as he'd been escorted inside the tent, but that single glimpse was enough to see just how over the top the Zodiac Council and their respective courts had gone.

Rows of benches, made moonstone on the right and sunstone on the left, had lined the temple. Paper lanterns hung on near invisible strings that criss crossed the roof, the lights within them glittering like stars. And the flowers, holy gods the flowers. Roses and hyacinths and wisterias of all colors were in full bloom as they climbed along the ancient steps and twined around the columns. But the true gem of all the decorations was the small fountain that stood behind the altar, white, yellow and pink water lilies floating peacefully on the water's surface.

"And the marriage being arranged..." His mother started to say, then trailed off, as if wondering if she should continue. "I've never met your moon," *your moon*, "but he watches over earth so he must be a nice boy," she folded down a piece of fabric, patting right over his heart, "just as you are."

She stepped back to admire her handy work and tears sprung to life in her eyes. "Oh, Izuku!" She cried, hands clapped to the sides of her face. "You look so handsome and— and grown up! I can't— my baby boy is getting married!"

His mother was full out wailing now, and Toshinori poked his head in through the tent flaps, likely wanting to check if everything was alright. He smiled softly when he saw Izuku's sobbing mother, rapidly fanning her tear flushed face with frantic hands.

He walked over to her and curled a gentle arm around her shoulders, starting to guide her out. "Why don't I help you find your seat, Midoriya-san. So Izuku can have some time to himself."

Izuku cast his mentor a grateful look. Glad he would have a few moments to gather himself before the drum beats would sound and start the ceremony.

"B-bye baby!" His mother sniffed, gratefully accepting the handkerchief Toshinori handed her. "I love you!"

"I love you too, mom," Izuku returned and his mother loudly blew into the handkerchief as she slipped out of the tent flaps.

His shoulders slumped as soon as the flaps settled back into place, a heavy sigh tumbling out of his lips.

He turned to look at himself in the oval length mirror, seeing what his mother had seen. His robes were immaculate, the rich pigment of the material holding the warm colors of the solar court. Jewelry glittered around his neck, dangled from his ears, and even rested upon his brow in the form of a crown. The polished, glittering circlet has been passed down for generations for each sun to wear, a ring of gold that connected to a jewel surrounded by the sun's shape, and rested between his brows.

As heavy as the weight of that crown was, it was nothing compared to the sheer bareness of his hands. There was no jewelry decorating them, only glowing skin. He gulped as his gaze fell on the finger that would soon have a new jewel slipped onto it.

Izuku's throat constricted. He reached for the jug of water to try and soothe away the nausea that threatened to make its way out of his stomach. The cool water filled his mouth and trickled down his throat, just as the pounding of the drums began.

Fuck. *Fuck*— Izuku barely kept himself from spilling the jug's contents all over himself, setting it back on its stand with shaking hands.

He turned to the entrance of the tent, where the flaps were now being dragged up by wooden staffs decorated in swirling ink.

His hands trembled at his sides and he had to resist the urge to curl them into the fabric swathing him.

It was happening. Oh Gods. It was happening. There was no stalling now. He was getting married. He was marrying the moon—

"Smile. If you get scared, smile to show everything's okay. Smile to trick the fear inside."

Remembering the words of his mentor, Izuku took a deep breath and smiled.

He kept smiling as he stepped out of the tent, kept smiling as he walked into the eclipse shrine, kept smiling as he passed the people seated on the benches, kept smiling as he beheld Shouto on the other side, crossing the distance to him.

Unlike normal weddings, where the bride walked down the aisle to meet the groom at the altar, Izuku and Shouto were placed on either side, and would meet each other in the middle. Nedzu had claimed it was to symbolize the eclipse, where the sun and the moon met each other halfway. Izuku suspected it was so one of them wouldn't have to be chosen

for the role of the bride. With each of them entering from the side, their positions wouldn't stand to offend one of their courts. The solar and lunar courts were considered to be on good terms, but neither of them would take kindly to the insult of their power or status being diminished.

Shouto was dressed similarly to Izuku, draped in extravagant robes of silver and cobalt. Their colors were the direct opposite to the gold and carnelian of Izuku's own ceremonial robes. Shouto's robes were also a bit more on the feminine side in style and make, not to mention how his long hair had been styled. His dual toned locks had been swept back from his face, half of it piled in a bun on top of his head and the other half left to fall in waves around his shoulders. He also wore a crown, nearly a twin of Izuku's, save that it was silver and where a sun rested between Izuku's brows, a crescent moon glittered between Shouto's.

As Izuku approached the altar, he was struck by the realization of how beautiful Shouto was. Not that he wasn't aware before, but in that very moment, Shouto's beauty knocked the breath directly out of his lungs.

Both of their footsteps halted in time as they reached the altar, the timing made perfect by the beat of the drums they'd carefully followed.

"Today, we witness the union of the sun and the moon," Nedzu, the wedding's officiant, announced.

Two rings rested in his paws, which he held out for Shouto and Izuku to take. They weren't decorated with a sun or a moon like Izuku had expected. Instead, the rings were simple. The thin bands were made of a dark metal, as black as night; the only difference between them were the gemstones. The ring held out to Shouto possessed a pearl, likely to signify the ocean tides the moons controlled. The ring held out to Izuku boasted a fire opal, it's gem the mirror image of the sun's fiery surface.

Izuku picked up the ring, as did Shouto, his fingers curling around it and shielding it from sight.

Free of the rings, Nedzu pivoted to face him. "Midoriya Izuku, do you take Todoroki Shouto, the moon, to have and to hold from this day forward, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, do you vow to love, honor, and cherish him, as your wedded husband?"

Izuku swallowed thickly, feeling every drop of sweat on him, each heavy layer of fabric, feeling every eye on him, the weight of everyone's expectations— as well as his own— on him. He managed to keep his voice steady as he looked to Shouto, who's expression was just as closed off as the last time he had seen him.

Raising his eyes, he said, "Yes, I vow."

He swore his whole body shuddered as the words tumbled off of his tongue. He didn't love Shouto, how could he? He barely even knew him— how could he vow to uphold that which was never there in the first place?

Still, he took Shouto's hand and barely held in his gasp of shock at how cold his skin was, so cold that Izuku wondered if he'd dipped his hands in snow. He regained his composure before anyone could notice, and slipped the fire opal ring onto Shouto's finger, letting go as quickly as he could and drawing his shaky hands back to himself.

Then, Nedzu faced Shouto. "Todoroki Shouto, do you take Midoriya Izuku, the sun, to have and to hold from this day forward, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, do you vow to love, honor, and cherish him, as your wedded husband?"

Izuku's eyes lifted from where they'd been staring at his trembling hands, to see that Shouto's gaze wasn't on him, or on Nedzu, but instead fixated on his father. Todoroki Enji was in the front row on benches on the lunar court side, his eyes practically smoldering as they bore into his son.

"Yes," the words were bland and hollow as they came out of his mouth, his gaze still on his father. "I vow."

Izuku clenched his jaw, annoyance flickering through him. Shouto's attention should be on him, not his father. Okay, so maybe Izuku had stared at his hands a little, but at least he'd looked Shouto in the eye when he'd made his vow.

Shouto grasped Izuku's wrist, quick and efficient as he slid the pearl ring onto Izuku's finger. Izuku had to suppress a shiver at how cold the metal was upon his skin.

After the deed was done, Shouto finally looked back up at him. Izuku silently lifted an eyebrow *'oh, attention back on me, huh?'* and Shouto scowled at him.

Izuku had been tuning out the rest of Nedzu's speech about love and unity, too focused on watching Shouto with keen eyes, until those final words rang through the space.

“The sun and moon may now kiss, and become the eclipse.”

Izuku had completely spaced on the part of a wedding ceremony that included kissing. Now, he was sure he was cherry red— if the heat flooding his face was anything to go by. He’d never kissed anyone before, what if he made a fool of himself in front of all these people? What if he tried to kiss Shouto and was shoved away? Looking at Shouto now, the moon looked more inclined to bite him than kiss him.

Shouto sighed at the panicked expression that must have been on Izuku’s face, then gave the barest nod of his head. Izuku took that as permission and leaned in to give him the smallest, quickest, barely there brush on the lips; something that could only hesitantly be called a peck.

The guests exploded in applause and Izuku jumped back as if he’d been electrocuted, his face burning even hotter than before. Shouto’s own cheeks had the slightest dusting of pink, the only sign of him being at all flustered. Even so, Izuku could *not* handle that itty bitty smattering of color Shouto’s pale face, he was literally radiating heat with how embarrassed he was.

Luckily, they were soon escorted off the altar together, down the middle aisle as the guests threw a shimmering luminescent substance over their heads, which Izuku soon realized was stardust as it fell over them. Essentially, stardust was *very* expensive glitter. Gods, they really had pulled out all the stops for this wedding.

The two servants that had escorted them off the altar, each holding a stick with a swaying lantern hanging off of it, walked down the steps and onto a winding path, Shouto and Izuku following them as they’d been instructed beforehand. They walked past the tents that had been erected for the lunar and solar courts, and soon came to a stop in front of a yurt.

One of the servants reached into their pocket and took out an ancient looking set of keys. They unlocked the door and swept out an arm, gesturing for Shouto and Izuku to step inside.

Shouto had to duck so he wouldn’t hit his head on the door frame as they crossed the threshold, and Izuku’s lips puckered at the fact that his husband was taller than him. It was petty, he knew. But he’d been made fun of for being small, a *dwarf*, all his life and he couldn’t help the tinge of old bitterness.

As soon as they were inside Izuku’s eyes immediately went to the bed against the back wall. The single bed.

“Have fun consummating the marriage!” One of the servants said cheerily and the door swung shut behind them.

The door shut behind them with a snap. The sound was still ringing through Shouto’s ears as he turned to his... *husband*.

The sun’s face bore a strong resemblance to a strawberry, his wide eyes darting back and forth between Shouto and the bed, panic evident in them.

Shouto rolled his eyes. “Relax,” he said. “It’s not like they’ll know if we don’t... do it.” Of course his father had neglected to inform him about this particular part of the ceremony. Did he seriously expect Shouto to bed the man?

“Y-yeah.” The sun’s relieved breath came out of him in a whoosh of air, and Shouto also felt a tinge of relief that the sun wasn’t going to insist on them... consummating the marriage.

Shouto strode to the wardrobe against the far wall, and started to shrug off his robe, resigned to the fact he was going to have to sleep in that king sized bed tonight. *King sized.* Honestly, did people think they’d need that much room? But Shouto wasn’t going to complain about it, the more space he could put between him and his new husband, the better.

A squeak sounded behind him and Shouto looked over his shoulder to see the sun staring at him, his eyes all but bulging out of his head for how wide they were.

Shouto’s eyes narrowed. “Just to be clear. I am not going to have sex with you.” The fact that he was pulling his bare arm out of his sleeve reduced the statement, but he wouldn’t let that stop him. “I’ll sleep here tonight, but you will stay on *your* side of the bed.” His skin was already crawling at the thought of having to touch him, and not just in *that* way. Everytime he looked at his husband all he could see was his father’s poisonous gaze. The words his father had roared at him echoing in his head like the toll of bells.

“Oh!” The sun’s voice was incredibly high pitched for such a well muscled man. “Y-yes! Yes, of course! I would— I would *never*—“ He waved his hands around, stuttering and stumbling over his words and

himself. His face somehow flushed even *redder* as he turned his back to Shouto, starting to get undressed as well.

Shouto stepped out of his robe, leaving it in a pool on the floor and began to take off the numerous jewels adorning him. He took a particular pleasure in the sound the ring made when he let it drop onto the wood. It rolled in a long curve before it fell onto its side with an echoing clatter. One he knew the sun had heard.

He grit his teeth as he sat down on the plush bed, the cloud soft mattress and pillows only further cementing his hatred for the entire situation. Why couldn't the bed be uncomfortable? Why did it have to be so easy to sink into? Like laying in bed with a man he was an acquaintance with at best was a simple thing to do.

Shouto pulled the covers over himself, keeping as far as possible to the right side of the bed, with his back turned determinedly to the middle.

The covers rustled slightly as the sun slipped under the sheets, the movement extremely careful as if he was afraid of dislodging Shouto from the bed. Part of Shouto wished he'd jumped onto the bed like it was a no gravity zone and sent him flying off of it. At least then he'd have an excuse to sleep on the floor.

He refused to interact or even acknowledge the man in bed with him, his eyes screwed stubbornly shut as if that would make this all go away.

The mattress shifted and the sun sighed heavily.

Shouto didn't know why that sigh annoyed him so much, but it did.

"*What*?" He asked sharply.

"N-nothing!" It obviously was a lie. The sun seemed to know it too, because after a moment he awkwardly continued. "Well... I know you're not too happy about this."

Understatement of the century.

"Neither am I, but we could at least try to make this work." His tone was so hopeful, and pleading, and *meek*. Open and unguarded. So sickeningly naive.

Disgust curled inside Shouto. How dare he try to *sympathize* like he was in the same position as Shouto. He had agreed to this, Shouto had *not*.

Shouto flipped around to face him, hissing and bristling like a cat. "Don't speak like you are in the same situation as me. You know *nothing* about me." Hurt flashed across the sun's face but all it did was add fuel to the fire growing within Shouto. The bitterness, the hatred, the rage that had been swirling inside him for weeks, for his whole life. "My father forced me into this marriage. I had *no* choice in this! When I tried to say no he threatened my mother to make sure I would go through with it."

He hadn't realized his hand had moved until it brushed against the scar tissue on his face and a joyless laugh spilled out of him. "It's funny. How similar I am to my mother, right now. Being forced into an arranged marriage for power." He shook his head, his chest heaving with what would fool no one as laughter. "I always wanted to be more like her- never my father, although I supposed that was a lost cause," he crowed, and the words tumbled like poison from his mouth before he could think to stop them, "after she poured boiling water over the left side of my face because in her panic, she mistook me for him!" His hand fell from his scar, shaking slightly as the memories flooded in a hazy tidal wave over his mind. The kettle screaming, his mother's panic filled and terrified eyes, the slosh of the water, the burning, the agonized cries of *what have I done, what have I done, I'm so sorry, Shouto—*

The sound of crying filtered through his ears and it took Shouto a moment to realize that they weren't from his memories of his mother.

Izuku was crying, the sun was crying. Tears were spilling down his cheeks, the water reflecting the glow of the sun spots they dribbled over. "Oh my god... Shouto, I'm so sorry—" His voice cut off with a heave, almost like a sob.

Shouto blinked, bewildered. "Why are you *crying?*"

"Because it's sad!" Izuku cried. "What happened to you is horrible and I'm—" he hiccuped, swiping around his eyes. "I'm sorry I made it worse."

I'm sorry. Everyone said that. But sorry didn't fix the damage, did it?

Shouto huffed, looking away. "This would have happened, anyways. One way or another. My father wants the sun's power and he will stop at nothing to get it. This is actually one of the less painful alternatives..."

He wouldn't put it past his father to have actually plotted to kill the new sun, and then have Shouto take his power for himself. Marrying the sun may be irritating, but at least this way Shouto wouldn't have anyone's blood on his hands.

The sun was still sniffling and Shouto sighed.

“I’ll tolerate us being *husbands*-” his lip curled at the word- “in public, but in private I want nothing to do with you.” Then he turned back over and closed his eyes, ignoring the muffled sobs he heard at his back.

Izuku awoke the next morning to a pleasant coolness against his skin. His sleep filled eyes cracked open, the light of day blurring his vision for a moment before it cleared. He first took in the fan of red and white hair splayed across the pillows, then a soft face, smoothed of any worries. *Wow, Shouto looks really peaceful in his sleep.*

Shouto. Sleeping. Next to him. Not all the way across the bed.

Izuku was then struck with the sudden realization their arms and legs were tangled together and the coolness against his skin was radiating Shouto’s body, like how warmth radiated from his.

Oh gods. He knew Shouto didn’t want him to touch him. Much less wake up to find them all cuddled up together like they’d actually spent the night doing... what the servants had expected them to do.

He tried to slowly pull the arm that was thrown across Shouto’s shoulders away, but the movement seemed to have rustled Shouto because he groaned, and nestled closer.

Izuku stared at Shouto. Frozen in shock.

Shouto’s eyes fluttered open, his groggy gaze meeting Izuku’s. Gray and blue. Storm and sea. Beauty and—

With a yelp, Izuku yanked himself away. Actually falling off the side of the bed in his effort to put distance between them.

Shouto’s cheeks flushed with that barest hint of pink Izuku had seen when they’d kissed. His eyes traveled down Izuku’s bare chest, his torso, before they snapped back up to his face.

“We will never speak of this,” Shouto hissed, his hands twisting in the sheets and pulling them defensively closer to himself.

Izuku nodded, quickly. “Y-yeah, yes, agreed! I absolutely will not talk about us being—“ he quickly cut himself off before he could ramble about all the things they had been, or could be, cheeks aflame.

Shouto twisted around, taking the sheets with him as he stepped out of bed and to the wardrobe to get dressed.

Izuku scrambled to his feet, keeping his eyes averted as he followed Shouto’s lead and started to get dressed with the clothes that were magically waiting for them. It was kind of creepy that someone had come in here while they were sleeping. Izuku decided it’d be better not to think about it. He would not think about what they likely saw when they came in here and Izuku and Shouto were tangled in bed with each other.

As he pulled on his clothes, he kept himself resolutely turned away from Shouto, not even chancing a peak, even if a part of his brain whispered to give into the temptation

Once they were finished dressing, they found themselves both lingering at the doorway, ready to depart. When would Izuku see Shouto, his *husband*, after this? Would they ever share a bed again? Would they ever even talk to each other? Would they forever be strangers in this marriage?

“Goodbye... husband.” Shouto’s nose wrinkled, like he’d smelt something foul.

Still Izuku flushed at the word husband, even if Shouto meant it in no way to be intimate. “B-bye!”

Then, they departed, and traveled back to their respective courts.

The wedding may have been over, but the thought of his new husband haunted every step Izuku took. He was married, but to a man that despised being married to him. So much for cherishing each other in sickness and in health. The whole marriage was just one empty promise.

Credit to @yoonkkun

your love affects me in phases

Written by: ncklpnn

★ ★ ★

The Earth was a place that filled Shouto with awe. From the rolling tides to the sprawling cities to the expansive forests, everything about Earth was beautiful. Shouto knew the state of the planet was due to a single person: Earth dwellers knew her as Mother Nature, Mother Earth, or Creati, but Shouto knew her as Momo, close friend and confidant. In the plane beyond the stars, he watched her care tirelessly for her Earth, aiding her however he and his Moon could.

Momo was always sure to thank Shouto for his work, for leading the tides in or pushing them away, for keeping her Earth spinning on its axis, for brightening the night sky. Though he'd try to accept her compliments, he'd always brush them off in favour of praising someone else. The light of the night, after all, was only a reflection of another's. Every day, his beams would cover the Earth in warm, unmatchable light: the one the Earthlings called the Sun, Izuku.

Shouto didn't see him as often as Momo did, of course, and he was wildly jealous of her for that. Izuku's rays would only touch him for part of the month, as Momo's Earth rotated around the Sun and Shouto's Moon rotated around the Earth. Every single day, however, Izuku would paint Momo's skies in breathtaking sunrise, and Shouto would watch, covering himself in a blanket of darkness and stars. He would silently yearn for Izuku, sometimes peeking out during the day, his Moon visible in the Earth's daytime sky.

In the evenings, when Izuku would decorate Momo's clouds with his daily goodnights, Shouto would step out of hiding to greet the Sun. He would absorb Izuku's light, allowing himself to shine while the Sun rested. Until the morning, when Izuku would return with

paintbrushes dipped in every hue of yellow, orange, and red, Shouto would mimic his light, paying homage to the most beautiful man he'd ever seen. He would await Izuku's return, hoping that he was doing his sunshine justice.

The Earthlings referred to Shouto's light in *phases*.

In his earliest phase, Shouto reflected little to no light onto the Earth. He hid his face at sunset, avoiding Izuku's glowing gaze, shying away from his beaming smile. For several nights, Shouto used the shadows of space as a security blanket, not allowing himself to be seen by the Sun. This phase was referred to as the *new moon*, a fresh start, a beginning. Personally, Shouto saw it as a reflection of how he'd felt when he'd first seen sunlight all those eons ago. He saw himself as small, dim in comparison to someone who shined more brilliantly than every other star in the sky put together.

He could never hide from the Sun for long, however, for he missed the sight of Izuku's shining eyes. Still keeping his face mostly hidden, Shouto greeted Izuku with quiet words and quick looks. The sunset would wash him in gorgeous light all the same, giving Shouto's tiny crescent enough illumination to fill the night sky. Every night, he'd show more of his face to Izuku, feeling his smile grow brighter and brighter as he mimicked the light of the Sun. The Earth dwellers called this the *waxing* phase, as if someone was wiping the light across the Moon with a careful hand. To Shouto, waxing felt like falling in love: there was more and more every time he looked again, until there was so much he was bursting with it.

He'd pass through the *half-moon* phase effortlessly, regaining confidence as the days passed, as Izuku shone, as Shouto watched behind his curtain of stars. Sometimes, he'd consider asking Izuku to dance, to fill the sky with both their light all at once, but he'd always hold his tongue. Lighting the sky in his place was enough; showing his elation, his love, through his moonlight would always be enough. Regardless, Shouto could never stop the yearning to be ever closer to his Sun.

Then, all at once, he was showing his full face to Izuku in what humans called the *full moon*. He reflected the Sun's light with everything he had, all smiles and giddiness. When Izuku would leave for the night, his eyes would be nearly shut from how widely he'd grin at Shouto, encouraging him to show his full, beautiful face. For several nights, the Earth would be awash in silver light just as powerful as the golden rays Izuku poured over her during the day.

Momo loved the full moon best, and she told Shouto that Izuku did, too. That they both loved when he wasn't afraid to show how happy he was, how in love he was. During those nights, Momo would dance more passionately than ever, spinning her Earth to allow Shouto's light to cover as much of it as possible. The waves crashed against their shores with more intensity, and the nocturnal animals were more lively. According to Momo, a full moon meant a full Earth.

After a few days of confidence however, Shouto would falter. Fear would seep into his core, telling him that he was being too much. He was showing too much of himself—to both the earthlings and to Izuku. Then, he would enter the waning phase, beginning to cover his face again, hiding in his veil of stars. Izuku would try to coax him out of it, telling him he felt the same, but it never worked. Shouto couldn't bear the embarrassment for long, running back to the security of empty space, waiting for his negative feelings to subside.

Then, the whole process would start over again: Shouto would hide under the new moon, shrouding his face in darkness. No matter how much he'd like to, he was too bashful to openly love Izuku for long periods of time. Izuku never seemed to mind, though; he coaxed Shouto through the new and waxing phases every time, until he was comfortable enough to fully reflect the Sun again. Every time Shouto's Moon was full again, Izuku's rays were more beautiful than they'd been in weeks, displaying for the humans just how much he loved the full moon.

Every once in a great while, Izuku would be able to bring Shouto into the light twice in a single Earth month. The humans called this a *blue moon*, due to its rarity, since the Moon could never actually be blue. Shouto, however, loathed the term. When he appeared for the second time in the same month, it was out of happiness, of joy, of love. The word blue, in human jargon, could mean sad, and Shouto would never want anyone to interpret the way he felt as sad. After all, who could be sad about fully seeing Izuku's face twice in a month, instead of the regular once?

Even more rarely, Shouto used Momo herself to hide from Izuku. Everything became too much, far too much, and

his blanket of stars no longer felt obscuring enough. Using the Earth's shadow, he escaped the Sun's rays directly, causing a *lunar eclipse*. Sometimes, the humans could still see the Moon during the eclipse, and they called it *blood moon* after the Moon's red colour. Little did they know the red was from the flush of embarrassment Shouto felt being exposed to Izuku; he was blushing so brightly that the Moon was blushing, too.

Just as often as the embarrassment became too much, however, Shouto gained enough confidence to ask Izuku to dance, to profess his love to Creati and to all her earth dwellers. He would stand in front of Izuku, blocking his rays from shining on the Earth, absorbing them into himself instead. For a brief while, they would dance, reveling in the moment they were getting to spend together. Instead of chasing each other around the Earth, throwing longing glances across the vast horizon, they focused only on one another instead of the humans that were left in a solar eclipse. The dance would only last for a few Earthen minutes, before Shouto got too in his head and bade Izuku goodbye, until the phases would allow them to meet again.

Fated Love

Written by: majesticanna

In collaboration with lemonferret

★ ★ ★

They say Love will know,
To hold strong in times of sorrow
Yet this story, woven with defiance
Where the Gods fought the fates

He ruled the Sun, alone
He'd only see the Moon, his love
In snatches of time
A breath of a touch twice a day
The heat of two hands that meet
And yearn to hold for a second longer
Hurried moments in a kiss of air
Til they are gone yet again

Fated Love did not spend hours
Guarding against enemies
And stringing their ties together
No, it was them, their hearts
They forged into one
Despite the tight shackles
Tearing at their skin
Chaining them to duty
Hands met because they made desire
Into action, clawing to remain
Safe with each other

Don't thank Love
Thank the passion
They put to fight for it

Kisses so fleeting
A brush of wind
A touch of heat
Palms caressing
But knowing they can now
Spend their days and nights
With each other

Credit to @lemonferret

Credit to @soapyak

Selenion

Written by: all_time_low3st
Content Warning: Angst, Major character death (but they revive)

★ ★ ★

The night is quiet. It's both calm and peaceful. The darkness he once feared is now a comfort, surrounding him like a blanket, holding him close instead of suffocating him like it used to. After all this time, there's not a lot he remembers clearly about his human life. Partially from the unavoidable dulling effect of time on memory and partially because he never began to fight to hold onto those echoes. Those experiences haunted his human life, he was determined not to let it follow him after it. His life as a mortal was short and unpleasant. The only bright spots that were in it are the same ones he has now, the same gleaming presence, the same blessed sunshine. The same warmth.

Shouto waves his arm, stars sparkling and twinkling, following his motions but hundreds of miles above him, the darkness shimmering overhead like the breeze that billows the sleeves of his kimono and makes his hair tickle his face.
He looks to the side of the small path, the little shrine that is nestled into a nook, overgrown by foliage and the paint long since faded and forgotten.

There are things sometimes that trigger memories, sounds or phrases that throw him back all those decades, that clog his throat and cloud his senses. It happened a lot at first, now it's not as often. He wonders if it will ever truly stop. If he'll ever really be free from the shackles of the past.

If he'll ever be able to walk past one of these and not remember that night.

'It's cold.'

That's the only thing he can think as he's led out into the night air.

'It's dark.'

He can't put his finger on it, but there's something not right about tonight. There's something off.

The people that lead him wear masks, veils and shrouds over their faces. It's all very ceremonial looking, almost cultish. Staffs in hand, bells jingling and tassels shaking, he's led through the forest, the only other sound the crunch of leaves beneath sandled feet. Not even owls or creatures make a peep. As if they know better than to open their mouths tonight.was thrown across Shouto's shoulders away, but the movement seemed to have rustled Shouto because he groaned, and nestled closer.

It feels like hours before they hit a clearing, before the trees show a break in thickness, sturdy wooden pillars erupting from the ground to form a shrine. It's simple, as far as structures go, but it clearly states its purpose.

It's dark.

Quietly, people emerge from the woods, gathering around the shrine in a circle.

"We have to right what has been wronged."

"The boy has to go. It's justice for our goddess."

His father talked all his life about 'destiny,' about 'purpose,' about what Shouto was born to do. He'd never once mentioned how it would happen.

He didn't talk about the stone platform at the center of the shrine. He didn't talk about blindfolds and chanting.

He didn't talk about pain.

Or fear.

"Kill him!"

That night marked the end of Shouto's very short mortal existence and began his endless life as the spirit of the moon and night; the curse however, followed him before birth and beyond death, it stained his veins long before his blood spilt for it. Shouto presses his hand over his chest, over a heart that's long been silent. There's no scar. No physical reminder of the injury that ended his human life but sometimes he swears he feels it throb. Sometimes he can almost feel a pulse. A thrumming in that long since quiet organ.

The tide washes up and tickles his bare feet, sandles discarded on the pearly white mounds further up the beach. He's not sure when he left the forest, his daze just instinctively taking him away.

He's never seen a shrine on a beach, perhaps that's why he has a fondness to it. That, and the water is soothing. It's rhythmic. Predictable. It feels like an extension of himself, like the drag and pull of the waves is his new heartbeat.

Each lap of the water draws further away, the nightime pull waning as he relaxes his power. As the barest

creeps of dawn hedge on the horizon.

The same way he did all those years ago, Izuku brings light into the world, drives away the darkness without hesitation or wear, his radiance penetrating the night, bringing forth the dawn.

Their lives were never fair then, when they were human. Izuku, for all his brightness, for all the purity of his soul, was squandered by circumstance, dragged into the mud and weighed down. He should have had all the riches in the world, but he had scarcely more than nothing. A blanket on the dirt and a village of people that didn't appreciate or like him.
Shouto still remembers how they met, those bright green eyes looking up at him from the ground, glassy and red, surrounded by dirty skin and flushed cheeks, by freckles that mirrored the night sky Shouto now reigns over.

He remembers opening his mouth to say something before his father shoved him forward, remembers looking over his shoulder as he was roughly manhandled through the door, a heavy hand on the back of his neck telling him people like that are worse than bugs.

He remembers sneaking away under the cover of nightfall, desperate for a breath of freedom, for anything but the oppression and coldness of home. He remembers tender hands and a comforting smile that pulled him up when he was almost trampled by a nighttime caravan. He remembers for the first time in his life, even in the near pitch black of night, truly seeing the light.

Izuku saved him.

They didn't know each other long, but he'd saved him.

Izuku had passed at sixteen. Gifting his life, his health, to his ailing father. Shouto supposes that's why he is where he is now, for a sacrifice that pure, that innocent, must be rewarded.

Shouto wrings his hands, staring out pensively.

They're opposites truly, in life and in death.

Izuku's status now is a blessing: Shouto's a penance. A sentence. A curse.

It's payment for bad blood.

He walks back up the beach, grabbing his sandals as he goes, the weight of his power slipping, leaving exhaustion and wear in its wake.

"Hello, Shouto." Izuku's voice is like ringing bells, clear and bright and beautiful. It carries across the beach, cuts through the wind like the wings of a butterfly and dances around Shouto's ears.

"Good morning, Izuku."

Izuku's curls are wild in the salty breeze, his cheeks dusted with rose and his smile bright as ever as he looks to Shouto with open arms.

I don't deserve you.

He said that in life and he's fairly certain he'll say it throughout eternity too.

For this is their life, this is their forever. Mere minutes a day, together but not. Aching for more and unable to reach it. It's Shouto's cruel fate, even more so that he has to share it. That it's tainting Izuku as well.

It's a fleeting, ephemeral embrace, holding each other for but a moment before slipping past, onto the new days and new tasks, whisked away to their separate places, their separate lives. The softest hellos and the most painful goodbyes. Shouto turns, watches Izuku's strong back as he leaves, the one shoulder that stands bare, that side of his robe pooled at his waist, the strength he carries, the honey kissed color of his skin now that he's no longer coated in grime and dirt.

He's a beautiful god. He was a beautiful human too, just no one seemed to see it then. Everyone was too blind by their rat race, too busy chasing money and lust and power. They pushed him out of the way, and now he's the one that tends to their days, that brings the sunshine they bask in and the days they power through.

All with a smile. He's always had a smile. Through joy and pain both, he always grinned. It's perhaps the thing Shouto adores most about him. That, or how the brightness of his soul gives even the sun a run for its money. How despite circumstance and despite pain and loss and fear, he never gave up hope, he never let himself be truly trampled. It's a strength that you can't really see and one Shouto envies deeply.

If he'd not met Izuku in life, he's not sure he would have had the will to keep going. That he'd have be able to keep getting up to face fury and anger and pain and cold day after day. That he'd be able to live under that man's foot the rest of his life.

Izuku showed him freedom.

He showed him love.

And Shouto gave him shackles in return.

"Go rest Shouto. I'll see you tonight,"

Izuku calls over his shoulder, green eyes keen as they watch the way Shouto rolls the end of his braid between his fingers, the way his anxious hands can't keep still, the bright tint of his lip from being chewed on too much.

Though his heart is silent, he swears he feels it flip when izuku says that, when he tells him in that soft longing tone how much he wishes their meetings weren't so short.

It's a bittersweet ache, to know they both feel so strongly, to know they can't change their fates.

I love you.

Gods above I love you.

And on days like today, he hates himself for it.

Izuku watches as Shouto turns away, as he whisks his hand to open the portal, his long fingers spread wide as he does.

It's a bad day it seems.

He can tell usually, with the way Shouto behaves. It's subtle, his tells, but after so long together, Izuku has learned to read Shouto's language.

t's not difficult to see when he's having an off day. To see the days when Shouto's doubts starts eating away at the little bit of confidence he's built. It's days like these that Izuku really rues what little time they have together. Where he truly aches that he doesn't have the luxury of sitting Shouto down and talking it all through, that he wants to curse that he can't comfort him and hold him and listen to everything he's been through and that he's holding on his shoulders.

Shouto has always been fairly private about details, but Izuku has more than gotten the picture of what kind of life he led before this. He'd seen it that first night, in the darkness under the willow tree, all the pain that swirled in young eyes. The still raw looking skin over his eye, the fragile composure he hid under small shoulders and a facade of indifference.

Izuku had gone home that morning and held his mother tight, suddenly grateful for the thing he had always taken for granted. Her love. He thought parents always loved their children, that it was an unspoken rule.

He'd learned that night it was not. That he may not be blessed in riches or means, but he's blessed in love and honestly, he'd take that over a castle and gold any day.

He'd take the minutes he gets with Shouto over hours with someone else. Those precious interactions, short as they may be, Izuku treasures with all he is. Sure, the greedy part of him still yearns for more, but if it's minutes or nothing, he'll just spend each second memorizing the brush of skin and the way Shouto's lips quirk up and his cheeks dust and cherish them for the twenty three hours and fifty eight minutes they're apart each day.

He'll hold them close to his heart, just like the fading memories of his mother and father.

Unfortunately, it seems afterlife for humans and gods is not the same, nor were his parents blessed with the same fate as he was. As long as they have each other, he knows they'll be happy. He'd never regret his choice, not in a million lifetimes, but god he misses them. His mother's smile and his father's hugs. He'll forever feel bad he made his mother lose a son so she could keep her husband, but she needed him more than she needed Izuku. Izuku was a frail human, when he was alive, not one that could have worked their town, that could have helped her survive. She needed Toshinori. When he'd been given that spell, he hadn't even thought twice. His health for his father's.

It was easy.

At least Izuku had been given a choice. At least he knew what he was doing, at least he was willing.

Shouto had only told him about his last day once, but he sees the aftermath of it in his eyes every time he looks at him.

"The witch told me about the spell and I didn't even think about saying no. She didn't even want the little bit of gold I had." Izuku's smile is sad, melancholic, as he plays with Shouto's hair. "I felt bad, about still making her lose one of us, but she needed him more than me. I got to save him. And if you wanna be cheesy, you could say part of me lived on in him." Izuku ties off the braid and lets Shouto's hair fall against his back. "I miss them."

Shouto can't really relate. He guesses he could say he kind of misses his sister, but he also didn't know her enough to truly miss her. And he certainly didn't miss his bastard father.

"Did it hurt?" Izuku makes a humming sound as Shouto turns around, his eyebrow quirked as he looks back at Shouto.

"Did what hurt?" They've never really talked about those moments. They talked about the before and the now, but not the transition. They

talked about the before and the now, but not the transition. They never talked about how either of them passed before. It was understood it wasn't natural, given they were both young. Past the age for childhood illness and too early for the older ones.

"Dying." Shouto's gaze has fallen to the ground at that point, hands clenched into fists on his lap.

Izuku doesn't know what to say. It didn't really... Living hurt, breathing hurt, but dying... That was easy.

"No." Izuku can see Shouto suck his bottom lip into his mouth, his teeth gnawing on it as he gives an aborted, jerky nod. "Did it hurt for you?" A sharp, shaky inhale echoes the quiet space.

"I lost Momma earlier that week. She was always sick, for as long as I can remember, but something finally broke and she just, she was just gone." Shouto swallows hard, a lump fighting him as he does, his eyes burning and aching with tears he won't shed. "She was the night spirit before me. I didn't get it then, and I still don't really know how, but my father stole her from here and tried to take her power. He tethered her to earth, and she just got weaker and weaker. Until she was gone. After that, the balance fell. The sky went dark. And without the moon, life fails. The people in town had never liked me, but they blamed me for what happened. They thought if they gave me back to the spirits they'd be blessed again, that it would fix everything. That it would make them even for what my father did." Shouto's breath is shaky when he exhales, though his face doesn't betray the emotion his voice does. "The village died out not many years later anyway. Father and sister along with it. I was six when they started calling me a cursed child, but I've been cursed since birth. Maybe even before."

Shouto's fingers trace the edges of the scar on his face, the rough skin that fades into smooth and soft.

'I'm blessed to know you Shouto.'

He hadn't said it then, their lives and patterns too new, Izuku's words still tinged with uncertainty, still unsure how far or how hard to push. But god he'd thought it. He'd wanted to burn down every shred of insecurity that life left in Shouto and build him up whole again.

If only they had the time...

It had been one of their rare days, those few and far between phenomena they were blessed with where sun and moon shared the same sky, that he had finally learned why Shouto had joined him so early.

Since then, the only way Shouto refers to it is as 'the curse.' Izuku has tried many times to tell him otherwise, but there's just too much time where they aren't together that Shouto is able to dig his way back into his old thinking. There's not enough time for Izuku to keep breaking down the walls that pain built in Shouto's head, not enough minutes as they switch places in the sky to comfort his worries and settle his mind.
Sometimes, on the darkest days, Izuku wonders if perhaps, they just aren't meant to be. That maybe he's not enough for Shouto. That he needs someone who can be there, who can be constant and consistent. Who can know what to say better, who can understand his pain better. Someone who can relate, who can empathize better.

Someone who's the opposite of Izuku.

On good days, he tells himself they just need to work it out. That eventually it'll even up and settle. That one day, they'll find a rhythm that doesn't involve periods of doubt and fear, that doesn't involve every meeting being preluded with rapid fire pulse and sweaty palms, afraid maybe this time Shouto won't want him. That this time, he'll see what everyone else saw when he was human.

He shakes his head, spreading his fingers as he gazes upon the horizon and the sun peeking out behind it.

Soon... Izuku watches as he raises the sun, watches the place it falls in the sky, knows by heart only fourteen days left until their next prolonged union. Two weeks until a lunar eclipse, where instead of minutes, they'll have a few hours together. Those blessed few times a year he gets more than ephemeral moments with Shouto are engraved in his mind, held tight to his heart.

They're a gift from the heavens, for the couple destined to be apart.

He's going to make this one count. He wants a smile back on Shouto's face

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Shouto doesn't know which emotion he feels more strongly: excitement or anxiety. At this point, the two have become so intimately intertwined that he's not sure he can tell the difference anymore.

The line he strikes through the calendar hanging on the wall is wiggly, curving and shaking with his nerves, all over the place like his thoughts.

It's not the first time they've met

like this. Isn't even just the second time. For as long as he's remembered life, as long as he's remembered the inky expanse of the sky, he's known the bright, crisp, innocent light that comes and blows it all away. That gentle warmth that graces the grounds and spreads through the leaves and branches like falling water.

The sun has always been beautiful to Shouto, fleeting, brilliant, and beautiful.

He swallows hard as he lets his fingers untwist the braid he had wound his hair into not an hour ago.

It's still two days out, still two long, miserable days and nights before he gets to see him. Really see him. Until he sees eyes as green as the grass his light nourishes, freckles smattered across his cheeks like the stars that hang in the sky under Shouto's watch, skin kissed with the bronzing of summer heat and heavens kisses. Two days until he can feel rough hands twine with his and not immediately have to let go. Two days until he can almost feel his heart beat again, until he can almost feel like he’s alive again.

Two days and a few hours until it's all gone again. Until it's another eighteen months of brief, effervescent glimpses, of barely there shadows of green and warmth. Somehow, though they chase each other around day in and day out, sun up and sun down, through waxing and waning of the moon, besides these oh so short reprieves in the changing of the day they've managed to create without disturbing the balance, they don't see much of each other. In the winter, when days are long and nights a little less so, they can catch a minute or two, a word and a wave as they cross the liminal realm.

Shouto sighs and gives up on the twist he'd been working his hair into.

He hasn't even gotten to see Izuku yet and he's already mourning losing him.

He rubs at his eye, at the taut itching skin over the left side of his face, trying to mash the smudges out of his vision. It never does quite clear. Always a little hazy, a little damaged.

Everything he does through the day, his eyes drift to the calendar. To the small inky spot that denotes the lunar eclipse, to the increasingly non-linear markings across the days as the blank white spaces between now and then draw smaller.

Even as he draws in the tides, as he eases creatures into rest, he can't keep his mind off it.

So soon.

I miss you so much.

If Shouto is peace and tranquility, the epitome of the beach in those Bahama advertisements where the tides are almost perfectly timed, where they follow patterns and unity, where everything looks to be in its place, Izuku is the opposite. He's a whirlwind, he's the blustering autumn winds as they make trees dance and shake, as leaves fall and whisk about the ground. Spring has likened him to dancers before, though Izuku would always respond that his movements are far too uneven and lacking rhythm to be equated to that. Personally, with her twirling and almost weightless swaying as she goes through her season, he thinks she's far more the dancer than he is.

Izuku is glad for the company he has through the days he can barely catch even a glimpse of scarlet hair or silver eyes. He's glad for the warmth of spring, the heat of summer's brazen personality, the serenity and severity of winter's.

He's glad he has them to talk to, though it always leaves a bittersweet taste in his mouth. They have partners, ones that they see months of the year at a time.

They lament that months aren't enough, but Izuku tears a hole in his cheek biting back the comments that it beats little more than a few hours a year.

He should be grateful. They could have nothing.

And he is, he is grateful for every second he's had with Shouto, but strike him down for being envious of those who have more. Of winter, who spends much more time than Izuku will ever have with the moon spirit. He’s envious because there was once he had Shouto for longer. Once where they snuck away every other night and knelt beneath the willow tree, quiet whispers and gentle touches between boys learning how to be friends, between teenagers starting to be more.

Before it was all whisked away. "You're going to make the weathermen tear their hair out if you can't relax a little," Spring says, her feet hanging off the edge of the pavillion, her auburn hair tickling her cheeks as she looks down, watching from afar the way humanity goes through their days, the tank tops and hats, the flustered faces of people who dressed too warmly.

"Sorry.." Izuku's intensity is ever changing, the heat of the sun

directly tied into his moods. He knows plenty of forecasters and vacationers alike have both cursed and blessed his mood swings.

"It's fine. It's getting to be that time again yeah?" She turns to look at him, her magenta eyes soft. Izuku just nods, a forlorn kind of motion.

He hopes Shouto still wants him. Absence makes Izuku nervous. Nervous that the thought of him, the memory of him will become better than the actual thing. That Shouto will be disappointed when they actually meet again, wondering what he'd wasted so much time thinking about.

Izuku's always felt underwhelming. He felt it as a human and it's carried on even after he was chosen to take up the mantle of the sun god.

It's weird, how the mantles shift and change. Some pass it on like a heritage, some, the right is earned, some it's battled for.

Izuku is glad he didn't have to fight for his role. He can fight, don't get him wrong. After all, he and Summer have had their fair share of bouts.

He sighs, leaning against a pillar, adjusting his crown on his head. His heart yearns in his chest, somehow every moment he gets closer to seeing Shouto, the more painful the absence of the months feels.

Spring stands up, bounding over to him with her bare feet and her light billowing white dress.

"You know he's as antsy as you are right?" Her hands are clasped behind her back as she leans forward to catch his eyes. "I don't see him much, but he asks about you. I see the way he tries to see you every night."

Izuku nods, but her words do little to untangle the knot in his gut. She puts her warm hands on his shoulders.

"Do you feel any differently about him?" She tilts her head to the side, her earrings glinting in the light. Izuku shakes his head. "Then why would he feel differently about you? Chin up. Sadness doesn't befit you." She kisses his cheek, featherlight in the touch as much as the meaning. There may have been a time he confused a crush with a desire for companionship, but he's long since figured that out. Now, spring is almost like family. She's beautiful and kind and lovely and he would do near anything for her, but the thoughts he once had about trying to court her long died out.

About the time he first caught sight of those frost fire eyes.

He thinks about them for a moment, his lip drawing beneath his teeth as he struggles to remember the exact shades.

Gods it's been too long.

I miss you.

The whole afternoon Shouto had been unable to sit still, moving about in a flurry as he tried to fight the anxiety and excitement warring in his veins.

The first hours were unbearably slow, meticulous cleaning only taking so much time and rest impossible to find. He couldn't even stomach food, every thought of it making him nauseas, making his stomach turn and growl at him.

Izuku still wants me.

He wouldn't have changed his mind that fast.

He repeats it, but it doesn't really make him feel any better.

Nothing does.

Not until he's finally stepping foot back on the mortal world, bare feet finding the sand and Izuku's smile greeting him just as the evening sun does, bright and warm and beautiful.

Shouto can't help it, he can't do anything but run to him, a fierce embrace joining them on earth and in the heavens.

"I just saw you this morning," Izuku teases, but when Shouto goes to pull back, embarrassment tinging his cheeks, Izuku's hold only tightens, his nose pressing into the crown of Shouto's head. "But gods above I missed you too."

Just like that, like water rushing by and snagging all the debris, all the fear and anxiety and mixed emotions, its washed down the river, leaving behind only love and contentment and life.

If only they had this always...

No. There's no time for that kind of thinking. Not now. He won't tarnish their time together with wishing for something else.

"How are you my love?" Izuku pulls away, his hands finding Shouto's, rough fingers twining with his as the moon and the sun share the same sky, gravitating closer, closer still.

"I'm better now that you're here." He can feel his cheeks flush at his own words but he doesn't feel shame for them. Izuku has never made him feel bad about the way he feels, has never scoffed at him or made fun of him for it. Izuku has embraced him, broken or whole, just

as he is. He's never made him feel lacking in any way. Has never seen the the things Shouto hates in himself.

“As am I.” Izuku’s green eyes are soft and sparkling as they look at Shouto, drink him in and savor him.

These moments are perfect.

They walk hand in hand down the beach, talking about the things they’ve not had the time to tell each other. About the bird that tried to make a nest in Izuku’s hair, about the food Shouto started and then forgot about, about the lives they see as they go about their duties.

They do this until they’ve set the skies in motion, until their responsibilities are done for awhile, then they ascend to the heavens, to the spot that opens up only these times, the only times they overlap in the celestial worlds. The only space that’s not his or Izuku’s, but *theirs*.

It’s there kisses grow bolder and touches more frequent, that words fall to the background and feeling takes over.

Izuku is sitting, leaning against the arm of the couch, Shouto’s back to his chest, both their robes folded neatly, just their soft underclothes keeping the air from nipping at their skin, Izuku’s arms wound loosely around him.

It’s the time Shouto always gets melancholic. When their brief interlude together crosses the halfway mark, Shouto starts ruminating. Ovethinking. Blaming.

“What’s on your mind love?” Izuku nuzzles Shouto’s soft hair with his nose, relishing in the juniper scent of his boyfriend, his partner, his forever. It’s been Izuku’s favorite smell since that night all those years ago.

“That it isn’t fair.”

Izuku nods, the answer familiar. Izuku doesn’t much get caught up in fairness. Sure, from time to time he gets envious that they don’t have the time other couples do, but being angry about what they don’t have doesn’t fix anything. It doesn’t change it, it just takes away from the happiness he does have.

“No. It’s not. But at least we have each other for as much as we do.” If Izuku hadn’t been blessed with this gift, he’d never have met Shouto again. He noticed that long ago. The human and the spiritual afterlives aren’t the same. He’s never seen a human past their life, and he’s almost positive humans can’t see him. If he had died like he was supposed to, if he’d let Toshinori pass and grown old on his own, those few short years, those brief nights they stole for themselves, that would have been all Izuku ever had of his friend. Of his love.

Sure, he wishes they could have more, but he’s also thanking his stars and gods above every day that he has as much as he does. That he sees those steel blue eyes every morning, that he can hold him every few months, that he can kiss those lips and hold him close. That he can feel Shouto’s breath, his weight, that he can try to ease his mind and soothe his soul. That they can be them, for as long as this lasts.

Shouto doesn’t feel the same, something Izuku has never quite gotten. Through all their years, he’s never gotten the grasp of Shouto’s disdain.

“That’s not it…” Izuku’s eyebrow quirks.

That’s an opening…

He turns them, so he can face Shouto, so he can cup porcelain cheeks in his rough hands.

“What is it then?” Shouto’s eyes are downcast, refusing to meet Izuku’s, his hands limp on the cushion.

He looks.. downright defeated. It’s no face he wants to see on his usually unbreakable love. It… it reminds him of the early days. Of the boy who didn’t know how to stand up. Who didn’t know a life without a hand on his neck directing him, ordering him this way and that.

“Don’t you ever… want more?” Shouto finally looks up then, a tentative exploration, searching Izuku’s face, trying to pick out a give or a tell if Izuku tries to lie.

Izuku’s never been all that good at lying.

“Of course I do,” his thumbs brush over Shouto’s cheekbones, over smooth and rough skin, the pale of his right and the scar of his left. A featherlight kiss against his nose before he presses their foreheads together, never letting go. “I would give anything to have this every day. To have you and hold you and comfort you every time I see you sad. But I also am so, so grateful that I have you at all. You are a gift, Shouto. I love you, however often I get to see you.”

Cool dampness brushes his fingers, runs down his wrist and sears into his skin. He’s seen Shouto cry only once before, feeling him cry again feels like a noose has been wrapped and drawn tight around his heart.

“I’m a curse Izuku..” Shouto’s voice is choked and agonized, the word

spat like acid and curdled on his tongue.

“Why do you say that?” Izuku tries to tip up Shouto’s chin, to get him to look at him, but he’s shaken off, more tears splattering on the couch with the motion, scattered like raindrops on a beautiful day.

“I was cursed at birth Izuku… From the start I was screwed. Because of me, Momma… she was killed and you, I dragged you down with me. I’m poison…”

There it is…

That’s what Izuku has seen carved into his face these last few days. The wear he’s seen in his posture, the anxiety he’s seen in his actions. The festering he’s seen hiding behind the mask.

“Love, you aren’t poison. And you aren’t a curse. Those people were wrong, they were scared and they, like anyone else, were looking for something to blame and they found you. But Sho,” he touches his fingers to Shouto’s jaw, his heart throbbing when Shouto flinches away slightly, even if he curbs it, even if he leans into it after. “You are a *gift*. I thank the gods every day for letting me have this with you, for not taking you away.” Izuku leans in, brushing his lips over Shouto’s cheek, feeling the shudder in his breath against his neck. “I love you Shouto, I’d rather spend my life cherishing the bits of time we do have together than spend all of time with anyone who isn't you.”

It’s a blur, a painful blur as Shouto’s knee finds Izuku’s groin, but he can’t find himself complaining when he has a lapful of Shouto, arms wrapped tightly around his neck, his fluttering chest pressed to Izuku’s.

He’s still crying.

“I love you Izuku… I wish I could give you more…”

“You gave me the world Shouto. You are my world. And I swear, one day, you’ll see what I see in you. You’ll see how strong and beautiful and funny and amazing you are.”

“You’re one to talk- about image problems,” Shouto hiccups halfway through, his damp face pressing into Izuku’s neck when he finishes talking. Izuku’s arms wind tightly around Shouto’s waist as he chuckles, knowing Shouto isn’t at all off the mark in saying that.

They both bear scars from their past, both wear the fractured armor on their shoulders, wounded and frail with all the hits its taken. But Izuku always had a buffer in life. He had his loving parents to come home to, to tell him he had worth and value, that he was loved and cherished. He had them to kiss his boo-boos and to dry his eyes.

Shouto got onto him once for trying to compare their traumas, but Izuku still thinks of the two of them, he got the better end of the stick. He got to choose his ending, he got to choose how to live his life, how to end it. He got to have warmth and softness. Sure, there was bitter and bad too, but it was offset. There was balance.

Or maybe he just tries to rationalize it like that. Tries to rewrite the way he remembers it the same way Shouto tries to forget it ever happened, tries to leave that part of his life in a fog, faded and hazy.

"Yeah, don't know what you're doing with me," Izuku jokes, his hand running soothing trails up and down Shouto's back. "And you'll always have me. No matter how far we are." Shouto nods against Izuku's skin, squeezing him tight once before pulling back, wiping his tears, a shaky smile on his lips. "I love you so much Sho. I won't ever let you forget that."

Shouto has never been the best with words. He's never found it overly easy to say I love you, even if he feels it with every ounce of his silent heart. He's not been able to say how much Izuku changed his life that night, how close he was to breaking. Even when he has spoken he's never felt that it conveyed what he truly felt, the worlds not encompassing, not broad enough, not emphatic enough. He doesn't know if the words he needs even exist, or if he just can't put them together right.

"You're my sunshine," Shouto says softly, every cliche and every entendre intended. Izuku is the sun Shouto revolves around, it the light that shines on his life, is the warmth that fights away the chill. He's the brightness and the happiness and he's everything Shouto needs.

"I'm always here, even if you can't see me. Just like the sun." He kisses Shouto's forehead, brushing his feathery bangs out of the way. Izuku wonders if there's a way to remind Shouto, even if he's not around. In those seemingly endless days where the brief embrace is all they have to get them through the day.

"I'll find a way to remind you," Izuku brushes his lips over Shouto's knuckles, pink spreading over pale cheeks as amber sunlight shines in. As the marker of their time starts to count down.

"I'll remember."

You say that everytime.

He doesn't blame Shouto, not in the least. It's hard, for people with other options and with such little reassurance to keep strong. It's hard for Izuku. He doesn't pretend there's not anxiety that Shouto will move on, that someone else will be even brighter than he is.

But in the end, he knows Shouto has his heart, and he has Shouto's.

He knows.

"Until tomorrow," Izuku is standing at the shore, watching as the cool tones envelop Shouto, the night air whisking through his hair and through his clothes, the chill settling into Izuku's bones.

That sad little smile is on his lips, his wave heavy, like he's moving through water.

Don't look so sad love.

It's not forever.

Izuku feels the weight in his chest too though, the string that feels like it's trying to tug him back to Shouto even as he walks away, that pull that tries to keep his heart with his love regardless of duty or need.

The heart wants what the heart wants.

He's exhausted when he gets back to his room in the spirit realm, when he sees all the thick lines on the calendar, all the blank spaces left before another celestial event that gives him time. The reminder of how much time he spends alone.

Wait.

That's it!

Shouto is ready to collapse when the tides finally start drawing back in, the pain of separation ebbing with it, the ache dulling as the hours drew on. The lack of rest in his off hours is hitting him, making his eyes ache and his head throb.
He doesn't really know how spirits can feel exhaustion, but damn he feels awful.

It was worth it though. It will always be worth it. Izuku will always be worth it.

Just like the pain after will always be worth the happiness during. Those moments of euphoria and content will always outweigh the longing in-between.

He loves me.

His hand rests over his quiet heart, the heart Izuku holds, the heart Shouto treasures.

Like a part of him coming home, he can feel when Izuku descends, when he's standing behind Shouto, eyes bright though circled by dark smudges.

It seems Shouto wasn't the only one who was having trouble resting.

"Morning, love," Izuku's voice is sweet like honey and golden and is better than the best music. Shouto would trade all the sounds in the world for Izuku's laugh, for his words.

"Evening, love," Shouto parrots back, yawning wide before stepping in, tilting his head when Izuku holds out his hand instead of his arms. Shouto takes it, smiling when he's pulled into a twirl and a hug, his heart yearning when Izuku steps away, skin almost glowing in the rising dawn.

"You're beautiful," Shouto murmurs, the harsh cut of Izuku's collarbone and the sharp angle of his jaw pronounced in the harsh shadows of low light, his eyes somehow still catching all the brightness and gleaming that emerald green Shouto loves so much.

"Rest well," Izuku says softly, his pinks betraying his embarrassment.

Shouto goes to wave his hand, frowning at the weight in his hand. Izuku is gone when he turns, the folded paper all that's left.

A yawn tries to take over and Shouto finishes his spell, transitioning to his room, closing the door on the world.

He settles on the side of his bed, staring at the paper pensively.

His feet feel numb and he's sure if his heart could beat it would pound.

"What is this?"

Dear Shouto

I don't know why I didn't think of this before. If you don't like it, I won't do it again, but I thought maybe this could help you feel close when we're apart. That you could re-read these words are remember what you mean to me. That these letters could fill the gaps between us.

You are the single greatest thing that's ever happened to me. You've told me you're a curse, but to me, you'll always be the greatest gift I've ever know. You told me once you thought my life here was because of my sacrifice to my father. But I don't think the job was the gift. I don't think this afterlife was the gift. I never wanted power or fame. I never wanted greatness. Fate knew you would be the moon spirit, that was set with your lineage. What I wanted in life, was you.

You are my gift. You are what I always wanted. What I always will

want. You showed me what I wanted to live for.

For as long as I live, as long as I draw breath, I will be yours. For as long as the moon rises, I'm yours.

I hope this helps, even a little, to brighten your darker days. That sounded dramatic. But I'm too tired to rewrite this again. I love you Shouto, with all that I am. You are my life, my love my only. You are my everything, and that will never change. Rest well my angel. I'll write you again tomorrow.

Yours,

Izuku

Shouto clutches the letter to his chest, can almost feel the words sinking into his skin.

Tired as he is, he fetches paper from his stationary and sets to write and he swears he can feel his heart beat with every scrawl of words he could never find when he spoke scratching along the page.

He can almost feel Izuku behind him, as if he's talking to him as he sets ink to paper. It's short, his bed awaiting him dreamily, but it's his and it's theirs.

It becomes their new hello and farewell. No longer seconds, no longer limited.

They find their forever.

Once-in-a-lifetime Discovery

Written by: Graendal

★ ★ ★

Dear Professer Todoroki,
It's my understanding that you're managing the excavation site containing (what we believe to be) the Shimuran Moon Temple. My team and I are handling the Sun Temple excavation and we came across an artifact that seems to bear iconography corresponding to the Moon cult. I've sent it your way in case it may be of any use to you.

I've also included my contact info in case anything else comes up connecting the two sites. I know you could probably look it up in the university directory if necessary but I figured I'd just go ahead and give it to you anyway.

Warm regards,
Midoriya Izuku

P.S. We did our best to remove all traces of scorpion venom from the artifact but you may want your team to go over it once more to be safe.

P.P.S. You and I met briefly at the faculty Christmas party before being sent out for our respective projects but I wasn't sure you'd remember. I'm looking forward to potentially working more closely with you on this!

Shouto enters the contact info in his phone and folds the letter closed. He places it back in the envelope (labeled **READ THIS FIRST** in large print) before turning to regard the crate it had arrived with. Scorpion venom? He lifts an eyebrow.

He does recall meeting Midoriya Izuku, actually, and it seems perfectly fitting to receive a box from him containing an artifact that he had possibly fought through an army of scorpions to get.

After retrieving a crowbar and some thick gloves (a cursory google search on the topical effects of scorpion venom had been inconclusive, but it's better to be safe than sorry), he carefully levers off the lid of the crate.

Midoriya is right — these are definitely Moon cult symbols, but the artifact itself is a strange shape. He takes photos of it from all possibly relevant angles and sends them along to his team members. Professor Hatsume may have thoughts; even after only having worked with her for a few months, he's noted several occasions during which she's proven herself to have a good eye for detail.

Izuku wakes up to the sound of something thudding against the ground. The tent canopy above him is lit up — must be his phone on the floor. He rolls over and flings an arm over the side of the bed, feeling around until his fingers encounter something vaguely rectangular.

Flopping back on the bed, he squints at the upsettingly bright rectangle. There are a string of texts from an unknown number — so many that his phone must have buzzed itself all the way off his bedside table. He scrolls up to the first one.

Unknown: Hello, Professor Midoriya. This is Todoroki Shouto.

He sits up quickly, suddenly wide awake. Fumbling, he manages to save the number in his phone.

The little thrill that goes through him is absolutely ridiculous, of course, given that he barely knows the guy. But can he really be blamed? Dr. Todoroki Shouto's numerous journal articles establishing an entirely new set of best practices for the preservation and analysis of palimpsests had been groundbreaking on an unprecedented level, leading to the discovery of several locations of extreme significance in their field (including the sites they are both currently stationed at).

It doesn't hurt that he's *unfairly* beautiful, too.

So of *course* he'd developed an instant crush upon actually getting to meet him. And now they're *texting*. Well, now Todoroki is texting him. Izuku still hasn't actually read the texts or responded.... Shit.

TS: You were right to send me the artifact you unearthed.

TS: Dr. Hatsume — with whom I take it you're already acquainted — believes it may be essential to discovering the secrets of the Moon Temple.

TS: According to her report, there is a door in the temple with an indentation corresponding to the shape of the artifact.

TS: The excavation of that section is

still in progress, but I'll be in touch in case we find anything related to the Sun cult.

Izuku blinks.

A door? That the artifact might fit into?

MI: That's very intriguing...

MI: Could the two sites be more closely connected than we'd previously thought?

Todoroki responds almost immediately.

TS: It's possible.

TS: I'll keep you posted.

MI: Thanks, please do

MI: And likewise, of course

Izuku yawns. It's still the middle of the night, but there's no way he's getting back to sleep now. Could there be any strange indentations within the Sun Temple that they hadn't noticed? Now that he knows what to look for, maybe he should go down and search more thoroughly.

He throws on his gear, grabs a headlamp — and the tranquilizer gun, just in case — and heads out.

Shouto runs both hands through his hair and stares blankly at his desk. It's a mess. The entire surface is cluttered with journals — everything he's ever written about the Moon or Sun cult. He'd dug them out of his trunk in hopes of finding some overlooked detail, something that hadn't been properly digitized. It had been fruitless, though — there's nothing indicating that the two groups had had anything substantial to do with each other.

But it's irrefutable. There is *absolutely* a connection between the Sun and Moon cult. A fundamental one. How is it possible there had been no mention of any of this in the texts Shouto has studied? It's not like there's some other expert out there who did a poor job documenting their findings — the only other person besides Shouto who could possibly have had any idea about all this is Midoriya Izuku, and he seems to be just as surprised as Shouto.

What they're uncovering right now could — *will* — cause a paradigm shift for their entire academic field.

The artifact Midoriya had sent over had fit perfectly in the slot, just as Hatsume had suggested. The door had opened on its own somehow (powered by what? It has to have been at least a foot thick and two meters tall), revealing a room whose walls had been completely covered in Sun symbology.

And in the center of the room, a pedestal with a distinctly Sun-related artifact.

No scorpions, at least.

He takes a few photos and sends them off to Midoriya. With the time difference, it must be past midnight for him, but he doesn't seem to adhere to a normal sleep schedule anyway, and he'd been adamant that Shouto get in touch with him right away with any updates.

And this... this is a pretty fucking significant update.

His phone buzzes — presumably, Midoriya reacting to his findings.

MI: holy shit

MI: eep, sorry

MI: how soon can you have that shipped over?

TS: The situation is worthy of such an expression, I think.

TS: And I can get it packed up today if necessary — is it urgent?

MI: I went down into the temple a couple nights ago and I'm pretty sure I found exactly where that's supposed to go

Shouto blinks. A couple of nights ago would have been immediately after he'd first texted him. He'd heard rumors, but could Midoriya really be so reckless as to go alone into an ancient ruin in the middle of the night?

MI: so yeah, ASAP, if it's not too much trouble

TS: Understood.

MI: I hope you didn't have much difficulty retrieving it?

TS: Not at all. The door would have been a challenge to open via non-intrusive methods, but the artifact you sent took care of that.

MI: No, I mean

MI: nothing was guarding it? No flesh-eating beetles or tripwires or spike traps?

What? *Spike traps?* Flesh-eating... what?

TS: No...nothing like that.

MI: Huh.

TS: Huh?

MI: Never mind. Just send it over and I'll let you know what happens

---

Izuku stares, wide-eyed, at the sight before him. This is not something he can reasonably wait to tell Todoroki about in a letter or a text.

He dials the number and waits.

At first it had seemed like the artifact had been ineffective, since the slot didn't seem to be part of a door at all. But then Tenya had come sprinting over from a completely different part of the temple where he'd been documenting the symbols carved into the sandstone. A section of wall conspicuously blank of all writing had suddenly opened.

The passageway it had revealed seemed to go on for at least two or three kilometers — hard to tell precisely, with how often he'd had to stop to disarm the booby traps.

"Hello?" Todoroki's voice is rough with sleep. *"Midoriya?"* The screen is black despite it being a video call — too dark?

Right. It's, what — three? Four AM there? He always forgets if it's a nine or ten hour difference.

"Yeah, it's me," Izuku says, only a tiny bit guilty over obviously having woken Todoroki up. "Sorry to wake you."

He's not really sorry. Todoroki probably won't be upset, either, once he sees why Izuku called. Probably.

"What's happening?" Todoroki is visible in the lamplight now. *"Why are you covered in dust? Are you alright?"*

"Don't worry about me. You need to see this."

Izuku flips the camera.

"Holy shit," Todoroki says, wide awake now, and Izuku grins, giddiness bubbling in his chest.

It's a fucking lunar calendar, carved into a stone slab in the middle of nowhere in the desert. There's no way they would ever have found it if it weren't for the chimney-sized shaft leading up almost to the surface from the room the passageway had led to.

It had taken some doing to pull himself up (even after climbing onto the pedestal below the opening) so he could shimmy up the shaft, which had been lined with mirrors. But he'd managed it, and planted a beacon at the top for Kacchan to work with.

"It was just out there in the open? Satellite imaging didn't pick it up?"

"It was covered in rubble, but my demolitions expert was able to speed up the process of clearing it," Izuku explains. "He's amazing. Nobody else can set charges with the precision he can."

Kacchan makes a rude gesture from nearby, and Izuku responds in kind.

Todoroki is silent, eyes flicking back and forth on the screen.

Todoroki is silent, eyes flicking back and forth on the screen.

"What do you think?" Izuku bites his lip. "This is huge, right?"

"Mm." Todoroki nods. *"I think it's indicating a date. I'll need photos, as detailed as you can possibly manage."*

"Will do." Izuku flips the camera back to face him and grins wide. "Todoroki?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm excited to be making history with you."

Shouto's heart is beating too fast to go back to sleep — no doubt from the thrill of discovery, of course, that's all. Midoriya seems to have gotten started immediately with capturing every visible detail of the calendar and sending them his way, so he busies himself with the preliminary analysis.

This will be tricky; Pre-Incident Shimurans used different time-keeping methods than Post-Incident Shimurans, and from photos alone it's not possible to be entirely certain which group had carved this particular calendar. After poring over each of the photos at the maximum zoom level, it's still inconclusive. It may or may not have been created contemporaneously with the rest of the Sun Temple.

He scrubs a hand down his face — lack of sleep is catching up to him. Focus. It would be easier if he had physical samples from the slab, in hopes of finding trace material from the carving tools and thereby narrowing the possible date range. He could ask Midoriya to investigate, but it would be better if he were actually there.

He could check the depths of each groove, see if they taper near the bottom, whether the strokes had been made upward or downward. He blinks slowly, eyelids getting heavier. He could make comparisons against the writing within the main temple, could move about freely without having to pester Midoriya to do the legwork for him. He stifles a yawn. He could find out whether Midoriya's smile is even brighter in person.

He folds his arms on the desk and lowers his head — he'll just rest his eyes for a few minutes.

He jerks awake, bolting upright as something jostles him.

"Todoroki?"

Shit, he drooled on a notebook. He grabs a cloth and starts blotting the moisture away.

“Professor Todoroki?”

“Yes, hello, sorry,” he says, and turns. “Ah, Professor Uraraka.”

“You look awful,” she says. “Did you even go to bed last night?”

Professor Asui’s bluntness has been rubbing off on her, apparently.

“I did, but Midoriya called and I wanted to get started on this right away.” He locates the tablet in the mess on his desk and pulls up a photo of the calendar before handing it to her.

“In the middle of the night?” Her eyes widen as she scans the screen. “This is an astronomical chart.”

“A calendar, yes.”

“No, I mean—” She gestures around the edges of the circle. “It’s a calendar, yeah, you’d know better than me; but this ring is showing the relative positions of Sun, Moon, and Earth.”

He blinks, sitting forward. How had he missed this? He reaches over and zooms in on the center of the slab.

“Midoriya said the hole is a shaft lined with mirrors, leading down to a secret room in the temple.”

“Holy shit,” Uraraka says, setting the tablet back down on the desk.

“That’s becoming a theme,” Shouto mutters.

“Can you ask Izuku for the exact coordinates of the site?” Her brows are drawn together. “And forward those photos to me. I have a theory.”

“What are you thinking?”

“If I’m right...there should be a second shaft not far from here.”

“There must be a miscalculation somewhere in all this.”

Izuku squints at the screen as Todoroki pans the camera across a desk completely papered over, covered in diagrams and notes. It’s late, and he’s in his pajamas, and his eyes are tired, but they’re so *close* to figuring this out.

“Could we be missing something else?” Izuku chews at the inside of his cheek.

Todoroki is renowned for his thorough and precise methods — it’s unlikely that he would have made a careless error, especially with the two of them having spent the past couple of weeks going over the work with a fine-toothed comb.

The camera switches, revealing Todoroki’s face, pinched in frustration. *“Maybe? I don’t see where another piece would factor in.”*

“Can we get Ochako to check over her stuff again?” Izuku frowns. “She usually does good work, though, in my experience.”

“If I have the date right, and you have your coordinates right, and Uraraka has her calculations right, and we’ve interpreted the symbols in the Sun chamber correctly—” Todoroki pushes his hair back from his face, and Izuku forces himself to focus on the words he’s saying. *“The Moon Temple should have a mirror shaft at the site we scoped out.”*

“But nothing’s there.” Izuku taps a finger against his lips, sitting back in his chair.

“Right.”

The background shifts as Todoroki moves, taking the phone with him as he crosses the tent and flops onto his bed.

“My brain is just going down the same pathways over and over again when I try to think about this.” Todoroki’s teeth drag over his lower lip, and Izuku swallows. *“I need to focus on something else for a while.”*

“Kacchan was being insufferable today,” he says lightly, and Todoroki snorts, lips curving into a small smile.

“I thought you said he was amazing.”

“An amazing demolition guy, yeah.” He drops down onto his own bed.

“That doesn’t mean I don’t want to leave a crate of snakes outside his tent sometimes.”

“What’s stopping you?”

Izuku laughs. “I don’t want our herpetologist to quit; the last two are already on stress leave.”

“Why do you even have a herpetologist on site?” Todoroki shifts onto his side, head propped on one hand.

Izuku scoffs, rolling onto his stomach and tucking one arm under his chin while extending the other to keep the phone at a decent angle. “The better question is why you *don’t* have a herpetologist on site.”

Todoroki huffs a sigh, gaze growing distant. *“I’m just worried that we won’t figure it out in time. Assuming the date I computed is correct, we only have a month or so before...something happens.”*

“What do you think will happen?”

Izuku lets his eyes slide closed while Todoroki speculates. The sound of his voice is soothing, nice to listen to even if his brain is too tired to parse the words properly.

“*...moonlight down the shaft could reveal something hidden on the pedestal,”* Todoroki is saying, and the adrenaline surge of a sudden realization has Izuku gasping and sitting

up.

He drops his phone on the bed and scrambles to grab some proper clothing.

“Midoriya?” Todoroki’s voice calls through the speaker. *“Where did you go?”*

“Moonlight,” he says.

“Yes, that’s what I was just talking about. The mirrors—”

“I took the photos during the day,” he interrupts, words rushed. “In the sunlight.”

He’ll need the good camera — shouldn’t need a flashlight, since the moon is full — shit, can he get there in time, before it’s too low in the sky? They can’t afford to wait for the next full moon.

He yanks his boots on and ties the laces haphazardly.

“Oh my god,” Todoroki says — he must have caught on despite Izuku being too flustered to give a proper explanation. It’s a good thing Todoroki is brilliant. *“This is it — the missing piece. Midoriya, you have to hurry!”*

“I know,” he says, shoving his phone into his jacket pocket and dashing out of the tent. He doesn’t bother to end the call. Todoroki would want to be here for this, and this is the next best thing.

He’s already jogged two kilometers away from camp — almost to the mirror shaft — when he realizes he forgot the tranq gun. And of course, the one time he doesn’t bring it, the ground starts to rumble.

“Oh, fuck,” he says. “A sandworm.”

“A what?!”

The camera view — already partially obscured by fabric — goes shaky as Midoriya starts to sprint.

Shouto’s hands are shaking too.

A sandworm. What the fuck is a sandworm? It can’t be good, if it’s got Midoriya breathing raggedly and running flat out.

“Should I—” *call someone,* he doesn’t finish. Because Midoriya had stumbled — and regained his footing, thank god — and Shouto had caught a glimpse of the thing. And heard the horrible sound of it.

He doesn’t dare hang up, because— because Midoriya is alone, and no one else even knows he’s out there in the desert. He scrambles to find another device to pull up the university directory and— No, that won’t work, he’s too frazzled to recall the names of any of Midoriya’s academic colleagues on site.

But there *is*— they’d just been talking about *Kacchan* — Bakugou Katsuki.

He’s found the number and is dialing before he can think twice about it.

“I’m calling for help,” he says, trying and failing to suppress the tremor in his voice. “You just have to hold on, Midoriya.”

It rings, and rings, and—

Gets sent to voicemail.

“Fuck!”

He calls again, and while it’s ringing he glances back at his phone on the desk. Wait—

“Midoriya! Where— You’re not headed back to the camp?!”

“No time — moon’s going down,” comes his reply, between gasps. *“Gotta get to the calendar.”*

“Forget the fucking calendar!” Shouto‘s fists tighten in his hair, tugging at his scalp. “You could die!”

“This is the discovery of a lifetime, Todoroki!”

“It’s not worth—”

“Who the fuck is calling me in the middle of the night?” It’s Bakugou — he’s finally picked up.

“Midoriya’s in trouble,” Shouto explains quickly. “He’s headed for the calendar slab and there’s a— a sandworm chasing him.”

“Fucking Deku!”

And Bakugou hangs up.

What— Is he going to help? Is he going back to sleep? Shouto presses a hand over his mouth, nausea twisting his stomach.

“He’ll come,” Midoriya says, breathless. *“Probably.”*

Probably. *Probably?* Fucking hell.

It feels like forever while Midoriya runs for his life. Five minutes? An hour? He reaches the slab at last, after having dodged the sandworm who knows how many times.

And— he’s right; there are new symbols, glowing impossibly blue in the moonlight—

But none of that matters if he gets eaten by a monster.

The camera keeps jerking as Midoriya has to jump out of the way of the thing attacking him — it seems like being on the slab prevents it from coming up directly beneath him, at least. That awful noise from the creature, like a scream made of rocks grating against each other, makes Shouto’s heart jump and the weight in his stomach grow heavier every time the monster surfaces.

What’s the survival rate of people

bitten by sandworms? Probably not high. One mistake would likely be fatal.

He watches helplessly as Midoriya narrowly avoids death over and over again.

And then there's an explosion, and everything goes still.

"Midoriya?" Todoroki calls out, as if his volume makes a difference. "Izuku?!"

"Kacchan!" Midoriya yells, and he sounds...annoyed? *"The sandworms are essential to the desert ecosystem — we can't just* kill *them!"*

He's worried about the fucking *sandworm?*

Bakugou's voice sounds in the distance. *"Well excuse me for saving your life, you fucking idiot! Going into the desert without your tranq gun, you're even more stupid than I thought, Deku!"*

"Fine — thank you, Kacchan, you're my hero — happy?"

The view turns immediately back to the slab as Midoriya starts snapping photos of the newly visible symbols, with a continued string of expletives from Bakugou in the background.

"What do you think, Todoroki?" Midoriya says, totally calm, as if he didn't just almost die a horrific death. The camera shifts to give him a better angle. *"Can you decipher any of this?"*

"Uh," Shouto says, weakly. "I'll need to show Uraraka, I think."

"Okay, I'll send the photos over as soon as I get back to camp."

"Right." Back to business as usual.

"Um— Todoroki?"

"Yeah?" His heart rate had finally started returning to normal, but it picks up again at the soft way Midoriya says his name.

"Thanks for calling Kacchan. You, uh— You probably saved my life tonight."

"Oh," Shouto whispers, knees giving out and dropping him onto the edge of his bed. "You're— you're welcome."

Thankfully, the most dangerous thing Izuku encounters during the return trip is the even-grumpier-than-usual Kacchan, who insists on accompanying him back to camp.

"Goodnight, Kacchan," he says. "Thanks for coming to my rescue." He keeps his tone light. No reason to poke the bear.

"Don't go getting yourself killed, Todoroki had also insisted he stay on the line until arriving safe and sound back in his tent, but judging by the sound of slow, even breathing coming from his phone, he seems to have fallen asleep. An adrenaline crash will do that, without conditioning against it.

He delays having to wake him up as long as possible — takes his time washing off all the sandworm guts, transfers the photos from his camera to his computer and uploads them to their shared server, changes back into his pajamas. But Todoroki had expressed that he wanted to see him safely returned to camp, and probably doesn't actually want to sleep through his whole afternoon.

"Todoroki," he says, quietly. On screen, Todoroki doesn't seem to react — eyes still closed, long lashes still resting against cheeks, face smooth of all worries in the way only sleep can accomplish.

"Shouto," he tries again, a little louder, and it works.

Todoroki blinks awake, lifting his head with a little shake. *"Midoriya?"*

"Izuku is fine, if you like," he says, twisting his mouth into a wry grin. "I think getting me through a life-threatening situation warrants some degree of familiarity."

"You got back okay?" A yawn stretches Todoroki's face, and halfway through he seems to remember to cover his mouth — Izuku smiles fondly. *"No more sandworms?"*

"No more sandworms," he confirms. "I sent over the pictures, if you want to take a look."

"Yeah, I will." He rolls his head side to side, bringing his hands up to rub at his shoulders.

Self-provided shoulder massage has never been effective, in Izuku's experience. His fingers itch to reach through the screen and do it for him.

"Ugh, I should not have fallen asleep like that."

"Sorry," Izuku says, automatically. It kind of *is* his fault.

"Aren't you tired?" Todoroki opens his eyes, frowning slightly. *"You need to rest, after an ordeal like that."*

"I'm going, I'm going." He leans his phone against the base of his lamp on the bedside table as he crawls under the covers. "See?"

"Goodnight, Izuku," Todoroki says, and Izuku's heart does a stupid little flip-flop at the fondness present in that wonderful voice.

He smiles. “Goodnight, Shouto.” It’s a little presumptuous, but he’s never been an especially risk-averse person. And the answering smile he gets as a reward turns out to be well worth it.

Ever since the sandworm incident, it’s become an unofficial rule that Izuku must be on a video call with Shouto whenever he’s awake and unsupervised.

It’s worth it for the sake of Shouto’s peace of mind, really, even if it’s doing horrible things to his sleep schedule. It’s not as bad as it could be — Izuku’s own total lack of circadian rhythm means that Shouto is still sometimes asleep at appropriate hours for his own time zone.

“We’re going to need to credit Professor Monoma when we publish, unfortunately,” Izuku says, between bites of his breakfast. *“Since it’s his sandstone excavation technique that we’ve been employing.”*

“Ugh, that’s right, isn’t it?” Shouto pinches the bridge of his nose.

It’s been another benefit of being in such close contact — they’ve been able to get started on the process of writing the first of doubtlessly many papers they’ll be co-authoring, even if they have no idea what the conclusion will be yet.

“Please tell me he won’t demand a co-author credit.”

Part of him balks at the idea because something so generic as an excavation technique doesn’t warrant such an important role in the publication as a whole — a larger part of him just wants to see his and Izuku’s names alone together in the doubtlessly numerous journal articles that will cite their work.

Izuku smirks. *“He can demand whatever he wants; doesn’t mean we have to give it to him.”*

He nods. They’re on the same page about this.

“Hatsume is almost finished with the excavation of the second mirror shaft site,” Shouto says, shifting gears. “We still can’t see anything, but she says there’s definitely something there.”

“That’s a relief,” Izuku says, standing up and wandering out of frame. *“I didn’t almost get eaten for nothing, then.”*

A pair of pants is tossed across the screen. Izuku is getting dressed, then. Just out of sight.

Shouto swallows. “I’d still rather you hadn’t almost gotten eaten in the first place.”

“*You’d rather I actually gotten eaten?”* Izuku calls, slightly further away.

Shouto snorts. “That can’t possibly be grammatical. And no, I prefer you whole and uneaten, please.”

Izuku comes back into frame still buttoning up his shirt. Shouto chokes on a sip of water.

This arrangement might be better for his peace of mind, but the benefits for his cardiac health are...questionable.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Izuku says, voice low and amused.

Shouto successfully avoids spitting his mouthful of water out all over the floor, opting instead to spend the next thirty seconds coughing as his lungs panic about a tiny droplet of water intruding in his airway. He waves off Izuku’s concerned utterances.

“You just have to manage to behave yourself for another month and a half,” he says, once he’s recovered. “And then we’ll be back at the University, where there aren’t booby traps and deadly insects and giant carnivorous desert monsters for you to wander into trouble with.”

“It’ll be nice to be home again.” Izuku sighs. *“I have to admit, when you redid the calculations with the new symbols factored in, I was a little disappointed to find out we’d need to be out here for another two months.”*

“We’re lucky it didn’t result in a date that had already passed.” Shouto rubs at his neck with a wince — his muscles will never forgive him for what he’s put them through in the past few months. “We’re unbelievably lucky that we’re here even remotely close to the right time, actually. According to Uraraka, the necessary celestial configuration only happens once a decade or so.”

“You’re right, of course.” Izuku glances away. “*Maybe this will sound silly, but I’m looking forward to meeting you again when this is all over, now that I’ve gotten to know you a bit better.”*

Shouto’s stomach swoops and warmth spreads through his chest. “Ah— Yeah. Me too. Except about you.” So fucking articulate. God, he sounds like an idiot.

But Izuku just beams at him, and Shouto can almost forget all about his bumbling awkwardness.

Izuku chews the corner of his thumbnail. The second mirror shaft has been uncovered and cleared out, resulting in a vertical route down to the underground chamber.

And Shouto is about to be lowered down into it.

Shouto, who had been shocked by the concept of encountering flesh eating beetles and pressure plate traps and tripwires. Who hadn't known sandworms even existed until a few weeks ago.

Shouto, who listens to Izuku muttering at him for hours a day and never complains about it.

Shouto, who Izuku can't bear to see harmed.

Preliminary drone footage had been clear of any obvious hazards, but that doesn't rule out all potential danger. Some things only come out when there's organic matter attracting them.

Thankfully, it hadn't taken much convincing to get Shouto to agree to wear a headcam and an earpiece linking him with Izuku. With any luck he'll be able to spot the threat and advise Shouto through it if necessary.

"You're sure you don't want Mei to go down?" he tries, one more time.

"I'm sure," Shouto says, and the view shifts to his harness as he checks all the buckles again. *"It's my dig — I'm going down first."*

A warm weight drops onto his shoulder and Izuku turns — it's Tenya's hand.

"All evidence thus far suggests that the Moon cultists were not as protective of their secrets as the Sun cultists were," Tenya says — an attempt at reassurance. "Or if they were, it was via less lethal means."

"I know." Izuku runs a hand through his hair before bracing both hands on the desk. "But it could be switched in this case, right? It's the Sun that's supposed to align with their side — maybe the Sun cultists were the ones in charge of securing it."

"He'll be fine, Izuku." Tenya's tone is confident, but there's a line between his brows that hadn't been there a moment ago.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

Izuku paces, nervous energy running between his core to his extremities and back again along his limbs as Shouto's team does the final preparations to lower him down into the unknown.

He should be there. He should have hopped on a plane and flown fourteen hours, leaving Tenya in charge here, so he could be going down there with Shouto.

"Izuku," Shouto says, voice close in his ear. *"Breathe."*

"I don't want you to get hurt." It comes out almost a whisper.

"I've had field training too, you know, even if I haven't had as many opportunities to put it into practice."

"I know."

He wraps his arms around his middle and watches as the view starts to descend. The mirrors allow him a look at Shouto himself whenever he happens to turn his head in the direction of one. He looks calm and collected, and Izuku exhales a slow breath.

He'll be okay. He has to be. They still have a journal article or twelve to publish together.

The sound of Shouto's feet touching down against the sandstone pedestal is loud in the absence of any other noise. The camera lurches as he hops down the last few feet to the floor.

"Look — no scorpions." His tone is teasing, but it doesn't alleviate the stress fraying Izuku's nerves. It could take a few minutes for Shouto's scent to draw the scorpions out of hiding.

"Is that a doorway?" Izuku leans forward, narrowing his eyes at the screen.

Shouto's flashlight sweeps back across the gap in the stone that Izuku had caught a glimpse of a second ago.

"I think so, yeah." Shouto steps forward.

"Check for—" He doesn't finish, as Shouto is already bending down and gathering a handful of dust to sprinkle in front of himself, checking for tripwires.

Shouto performs everything to textbook perfection as he travels down the passage, flashlight oscillating from wall to floor to ceiling to wall but not revealing any arrow slots or spike holes or fire nozzles. He doesn't let his guard down for a moment despite the continued lack of any sign of danger. Izuku lets himself sit down.

Hours pass. Probably not really. It's probably minutes. He doesn't dare speak up and distract Shouto.

"Dead end?" Shouto murmurs, as the light hits a wall on the far end of the passage.

Izuku scans the screen, hunting for some obscure detail as Shouto approaches the seemingly blank wall.

One of the bricks has a tiny moon carved into it.

"There—"

"Here—"

He smiles. Of course Shouto would notice it just as quickly. Pressing the brick makes the wall begin to slide to the side, revealing—

A room covered in Sun markings, with an empty pedestal in the center.

"Oh." Shouto says, tone tinged with surprise. *"This place."*

"Which place? What place?" Izuku stands up again. "Where are you?"

"I'm back in the main temple — this is the room your Moon artifact opened up all those months ago."

It's true — Mei and Ochako come into view, presumably having come down the easy way after recognizing Shouto's location.

Izuku drops his head into his arms on the desk. If it had been just him, he'd been feeling like that had been disappointingly anticlimactic. But the only thing he's feeling right now is relief, immense relief washing over him that Shouto is okay, Shouto is safe, nothing bad happened.

Is all that stress how his friends feel whenever he's out on an adventure? Is that how his *mother* feels? Fuck. That was awful.

He glances up, cheek resting on his forearms, as just as Shouto's taking off the headgear, his face coming into view as he turns the camera around.

"That was fun! Very exciting — a nice change of pace from all the desk work." He has a huge grin on his face, and something in Izuku's chest melts. He smiles back at him and sighs.

"Don't tell me I'm the one who'll need to be keeping an eye on you from now on."

"No promises." Shouto winks — *winks!* — before shifting into supervisor mode and directing his people in the setup of monitoring equipment now that they have a workable pathway to the shaft chamber.

Izuku just watches, heart pounding for reasons having nothing to do with tripwires and deadly insects.

Shouto is supposed to be sleeping. Tomorrow is possibly going to be the single most significant day in his career as an archaeologist. Izuku had promised to avoid any reckless behavior (and Bakugou had promised to drag him back to his tent if necessary) specifically so that Shouto could get a full night's rest, but at this point it seems like that will be a fruitless endeavor.

He throws on a sweater and steps out of his tent. They're so far from (modern) civilization that there are no nearby cities or towns to act as a source of light. On moonless nights the desert itself is impossibly dark, but the stars are so bright that the Milky Way is spread out in astonishing detail and no part of the sky looks truly black, if one looks closely enough.

But this night is lit up, the Moon looming large in the sky, a perfect circle illuminated by the Sun, reflecting its light to outline every ripple of the surrounding desert, every dune and valley, as far as the eye can see. In a matter of hours, Izuku will be looking up at that exact same tidally locked Moon.

Vertigo washes over him at the suddenly too-concrete perception of the Earth rotating beneath his feet, at the thought of the Moon physically traveling along its arc to find Izuku waiting for it, at the broader sense of the Earth itself revolving around the Sun, with Shouto himself an insignificant speck amongst it all.

"Can't sleep?"

He turns his attention away from the universe to regard Uraraka outside the tent opposite his.

"Just contemplating my own insignificance in the scope of the universe," he says.

"Mm." She crosses over, coming to stand beside him. "I know what you mean, but that's not how I think of it."

Uraraka tilts her face up, observing the night, and a surge of wistfulness wells up in Shouto's chest. But while she's welcome enough company, she's not the one with whom he wants to be standing in the desert, watching the starry sky. Hers aren't the eyes he wants to see lit up with moonlight.

"Enlighten me," he says, anyway.

She exhales slowly — the night is cold enough and the air dry enough that her breath is as visible as it would be on a chilly Winter evening.

"Sure, our short, tiny lives may have no impact whatsoever on the impossibly infinite expanse of stars and galaxies and groups and clusters and superclusters—"

She cuts off, glancing at him with a sheepish smile. "Sorry. Anyway, even if that's the case — why would any of it matter without someone out there to observe it?"

"And that's us?"

"Yep." She yawns, then, and gestures over to her tent. "I'm gonna give sleep another chance, I think. You should too."

He nods, returning her wave as she steps into her tent and lets the flap fall behind her.

He dials Izuku's number after crawling back into bed, even though he can feel the sleepiness creeping up on him already.

“Hey, Shou,” comes Izuku’s voice, right there in his ear, and he lets the tension bleed out of him, eyes sliding shut. *“What are you doing awake?”*

“I’m going to sleep. Promise,” he murmurs, turning his face to press partly into his pillow. “Just wanted to hear your voice.”

There’s a pause on the other end, and he’s nearly slipped from consciousness by the time Izuku speaks again, just a soft *“oh.”*

Izuku clears his throat. *“I can’t believe it’s going to happen tonight — tomorrow, for you. What if… Will you be disappointed if there’s nothing for us to do? If we just, I don’t know, see whatever appears and then it goes away and that’s all there is to it?”*

Shouto smiles. “Maybe that’s significant enough. Be there to observe, so it matters that it happened at all.”

“*Yeah.”* Izuku sighs. *“Thanks…that helps.”*

“Mm.” Shouto nestles down in his blankets. He can almost manage to pretend he’s not alone. “Goodnight, Izuku.”

“Sleep well, Shouto.”

When it happens, it’s with a dozen cameras recording the pedestal from all angles. It’s not really necessary for anyone to watch in person, but the room is crowded anyway, everybody leaning in as close as they can manage without interfering with the cameras, wanting to see for themselves. Even Kacchan had requested to be present.

But as the Moon sends its beams down the shaft, as glowing blue symbols begin to appear on the previously blank surface, as a cheer rises among the spectators, Izuku’s eyes wander over to his phone screen, where Shouto is watching the same thing happen on the other side of the world.

He’d rather see Shouto’s reaction to this once-in-a-lifetime discovery than watch it himself.

But Shouto’s not looking at the pedestal. He’s looking right back at Izuku.

They share a smile and a silent laugh before turning back to observe the last few seconds of the illumination of the pedestals.

Over the next few days, a preliminary analysis of the text suggests a third, distant location — another temple? But nothing to do with their recently completed excavations.

With no reason for Izuku and Shouto to remain at their respective dig sites, Dean Yaoyorozu instructs them to return to the University. Teams are sent out to dismantle and pack up their camps, but the priority for Izuku and Shouto is to get started right away on organizing all of their findings.

It’s jarring to be uprooted from the project that had dominated every aspect of his life for almost a year, but that’s what this life entails, sometimes. And he has things to look forward to when he gets home.

Upon arrival, Izuku stumbles into his apartment and sleeps for fourteen hours.

For days, Izuku wakes up disoriented, expecting to be surrounded by thick canvas shielding him from sand and wind and heat, and finding instead the offwhite walls and double-paned windows of faculty housing separating him from a campus covered in trees and grass and flowers.

Shouto is back, too, of course, and when they meet it’s strange and familiar at the same time. And there’s something there, something between them other than the mountain of academic work they need to tackle together — something made of shy glances and pink-tinged cheeks, something in the way their hands linger whenever they happen to touch. Something about how they hesitate to say goodnight and go their separate ways at the end of a long day of working together.

Something substantial enough that when Yaoyorozu schedules a meeting with him to talk about his next project in the field, he doesn’t feel the usual thrill of anticipation. He’s not excited to be getting back out there, going on a new adventure, discovering hidden secrets.

He’d rather stay. He’d rather discover what he could have with Shouto, would rather go on that adventure.

So he drags his feet as he makes his way to Yaoyorozu’s office. He can’t just throw his career away, though, can’t skip the meeting altogether. But he is a few minutes late.

“Professor Midoriya, so glad you could join us,” she says, and he looks up from the floor. *Us?*

“She’s sending us to Norway,” Shouto says, turning to face him in one of the chairs in front of Yaoyorozu’s desk.

Us?

He blinks.

“From the information we were able to glean from the pedestal text, there was a third Shimuran cult.”

Yaoyorozu pushes on with the explanation, but Shouto's small smile has all of his attention.

"...two weeks." Yaoyorozu hands him a dossier.

"Huh?" An eloquent query, exactly what one would expect from a tenured Professor with dozens of published articles.

Yaoyorozu clears her throat, lips pressed into a thin line, but he catches sight of a knowing gleam in her eyes. "A portion of the pedestal symbols, when combined, form coordinates indicating the existence of a hitherto unknown third temple on an Archipelago off the coast of Norway. You and Professor Todoroki will be heading out to begin the excavation of the Temple of the Aurora in two weeks."

"What about what we've been working on since we got back? Who will take over?" Izuku asks, but his heart is racing, that missing thrill of anticipation zinging through him at last, and he knows the answer doesn't really matter.

"Who do you think handled the analysis that led to your new assignment? Grad students, of course." She chuckles and waves them out of the room.

In the hallway, Shouto turns to face him, his small smile threatening to turn into something larger, brighter.

"At least there won't be any sandworms," Izuku says, and that's enough to do it.

Shouto laughs and laughs, until he's wiping tears from his cheeks, and it's the best thing Izuku has seen or heard in a lifetime of adventuring.

Maybe it's a risky plan — or maybe it's the best plan ever — since they'll be working together in close quarters for the next several months at least, but...

"Will you go out to dinner with me tonight?" he asks, once Shouto has caught his breath, while the two of them are standing delightfully close together, heads inclined slightly because Shouto is a little bit taller than Izuku. He bridges the narrow gap between them with a gentle hand on Shouto's waist, fingers curling and thumb stroking softly, so it's perfectly clear exactly what kind of invitation this is.

...He's never been an especially risk-averse person.

Shouto's eyes flick down to Izuku's lips so briefly he might have imagined it. "I'd love to."

Phases of the Stars

Written by: Little-Miss-Heartfillia

Content Warning: Mentions of parental loss and disaster. Brief mentions of past Todoroki abuse.

★ ★ ★

"The map says it's just up this ridge!" Midoriya grabbed Shouto's hand and pulled him farther up the hill. Shouto was still panting, his shirt was sticking to his sweat, his binder too hot to sit in, but the morning air was cold and his fingers felt like ice. He almost wondered how Midoriya didn't flinch at his chilled skin.

His knees were just starting to ache as the sun began to peak over the top of the mountain. Shouto could see it through the trees, it was red, golden, dull and hazy. It's rays impaled a path through the canopy of leaves, little pinpricks of light turned the midnight blue sky behind them to purple. Birdsong had been ringing around the clearing since the moon went down but now Shouto could hear more of the wildlife begin to wake up.

A chickadee fluttered up and down as it flew over the ridge, silhouetted and subsequently dwarfed by the sun. Shouto's breath caught in his throat and he would've stopped to watch the sun if Midoriya wasn't still pulling him to the top.

If Shouto thought the sight of the cresting sunrise was beautiful, he hadn't even imagined the sight he'd see when the earth finally gave way to the mountain peak. Midoriya paused at the top and stared, eyes wide, hand still holding Shouto's.

"Wow," came his breathless response.

The trees on the other side of the mountain were like charred tips of wooden logs against the sunrise. It was shining so golden it nearly made Shouto's eyes hurt. The sky around it was still darkened. Purple at the edges of the sun's halo where wisps of clouds wrapped around the sun and a fog settled on the skyscrapers of the cities to the right.

The valley was a deep green, nearly black compared to the brilliance of the deity in the sky. The fog that settled in the cities was still shrouded in the darkness of night. As the sun rose higher, more of its body taking form beside the mountain in the distance, rays of light fell onto the fog like a blanket being pulled up to a child's chin. The light caught the fog and suddenly the city was glowing, sparkling with invisible crystals as the neon street signs lost their luster.

Shouto took a step to stand beside Midoriya, his heavy breathing slowed down as he took in the sight. Shouto's palms were already sweating from holding Midoriya's hand but he didn't seem to notice, or if he did he didn't care.

Shouto turned to look at him. Midoriya, with freckles blessed by the sun's kiss and green hair more luscious than the valley below. He was smiling easily, a simple smile. It wasn't huge or face splitting but every part of it was genuine. The corners of his lips twitched as his eyes settled into the view and into an expression of serenity.

Shouto squeezed Midoriya's hand, trying to make sure he was really still there. That Shouto was really here. They had gotten up in the middle of the night to make this hike. Midoriya had said it would be worth it and they both needed the endurance training. But Shouto hadn't expected it to take his breath away.

Shouto watched Midoriya scan the scene below them. The glow of the golden sun was brushing his face with a soft beauty that Shouto didn't get to see often. Midoriya closed his mouth and breathed deep, his eyes shut as well as he fully took in the moment, experiencing every sensation this could give him. All Shouto could smell was his own sweat, and a little bit of pine underneath that, but it wasn't unpleasant. Nothing was unpleasant with Midoriya.

The sky behind Midoriya's head was split in two. Shouto could see where the sun had yet to touch the darkened corners of the earth, but it was slowly growing. Spreading it's light until the yellow rays enveloped Midoriya like a halo.

Shouto wasn't sure how long they stood like that, Midoriya taking in the scene and him enjoying something he wouldn't miss for the world. Eventually, Midoriya turned to Shouto and he didn't have any time to pretend like he hadn't been staring.

Midoriya's eyes glinted with a brief moment of realization, but he smiled instantly and it was gone. "The uh-" he began and cleared his throat. "The lookout is down there. Do you want to go down and eat?" Midoriya

pointed to a spot below the ridgeline, where a long stretch of concrete railings held onlookers above the trees to keep them from falling down the cliff face.

Shouto closed his mouth, he hadn't known he'd opened it, and nodded. Midoriya's smile grew and Shouto could have sworn his heart swelled ten times its size. Just like before Midoriya pulled Shouto along, squeezing his hand back as they gingerly made their way down a path of rocks and roots to reach the lookout.

There was an information board off to the side with maps and articles about the precious few mountains that rose out of the valley. There was hardly anyone here. A couple sat by the far outskirt of the lookout, their legs dangling off the cliff as they nestled their heads against each other. There was an old man doing stretches close to the information board, but the mountain was deserted aside from them.

Midoriya led Shouto up a set of stairs to some park benches. He stopped holding Shouto's hand so he could look at all of them and then picked the one he liked best by pointing to it happily.

Shouto adjusted the strap of the lunchbox on his shoulder and followed Midoriya as he sat down.

"I used to watch the sunrise with my mom when I was little," Midoriya spoke as they each pulled out their own bentos. "I think she wanted to make me feel like I wasn't alone." Midoriya stopped watching the sky and looked at his lap as he kept talking. "I never had any friends growing up and so I would watch videos of All Might saving people and dream of being like him. I remember one day I had a particularly bad day at school. Kids were picking on me constantly, I felt useless and she could tell right when I got home what was wrong."

Shouto hadn't opened his bento yet. His eyes were fixed on Midoriya as he talked. He couldn't stop staring at the way his lips glistened and his eyelashes made dramatic shadows run down his round cheeks.

"She made me go to bed early that day," Midoriya said. "I didn't understand why and it kind of made me more upset, but then she woke me up at 4 AM so we could go hiking." Midoriya pried open the lid to his bento and picked up the chopsticks that laid on the side of it. "I was dead tired still so Mom carried me all the way. She woke me up when we got to the top, she was pretty out of shape but I'll never forget the way she smiled at me as the sun rose behind her."

Midoriya finally looked up at the sky again. The sun had risen high enough that most of the golden hues had been replaced by yellow rays and there was a bit of blue sky showing on the horizon. Midoriya's eyes were sparkling with memories as he turned towards Shouto.

"Thank you for coming out here with me, Shouto."

It took Shouto a minute to realize he was supposed to respond. It took even longer for him to understand he should have said something nice back, so what came out was. "Thanks, I like it."

Shouto mentally kicked himself. He felt a blush creep up to his ears but Midoriya easily laughed it off. That's right. This was Midoriya. He knew how it felt to not get your words right. He knew what it was like to want to speak prolifically but not be able to form a rational thought. He understood when Shouto felt this way, so there was nothing Shouto should be worried about.

Midoriya turned back to watching the sun as he began to eat his breakfast. A stray piece of rice stuck to his cheek as he chewed, catching Shouto's eye. Suddenly he remembered how Iida had looked after he made them their breakfast early that morning and told them to go on their way.

Before that Iida had pulled Midoriya aside. Shouto was too tired to listen in at the time, he just sat at the common room's couch and sipped his coffee but he did manage to catch some things. "Speak from your heart, Midoriya, and tell him how you feel..." his words cut off but then he thought he heard his name. It could've been his imagination though.

By the time Midoriya had come back to sit with Shouto, bentos in hand, he was looking nervous but he quickly tried to cover it with a smile. In fact since then Midoriya had seemed anxious. As if he was waiting for something to happen, or had something to say.

Shouto didn't know if it was his place to pry, if this was something he didn't want to talk to Shouto about, if it was too personal, but if something was troubling Midoriya he wanted to know. He jabbed his chopstick into a piece of boiled egg and asked, "What did Iida mean this morning?" Midoriya turned to him with confusion as Shouto popped the egg into his mouth. "Who are

you nervous about talking to?”

Midoriya’s face instantly went as red as the sunrise had been moments ago. He hid behind his hands as he looked away, stammering and unable to form a proper sentence. “U-uh,” Midoriya’s voice rasped and he coughed a little. Shouto handed him the water bottle they’d been sharing with a blank expression.

Midoriya took a deep breath as he grabbed the water, though his mouth was wobbling uneasily. Once he took a sip he looked like he had calmed down enough to speak. Shouto waited patiently, knowing that Midoriya was thinking about his words, even as he stared at the edge of the rocks below.

“Iida was...just giving me advice.” Midoriya picked at a spot on his cheek, still not looking at Shouto.

Shouto looked at the ground for a moment. He thought carefully about his next sentence as he chewed and swallowed his food. “I figured he was. You’ve been anxious the entire walk up, I was wondering if something was bothering you.”

Midoriya’s lips thinned out and he tucked his hands under his thighs. “Not-not exactly,” he said, trying to hide his blush by looking the other way.

Shouto leaned into him, hoping to get a read on his expression but he was thinking too many different things right now, it made it hard for Shouto to understand what he was nervous about. “Midoriya?” Shouto asked and Midoriya turned his head, their noses almost brushed by how close they were. Midoriya’s eyes widened but he kept his eyes locked on Shouto’s face. “Do you want to talk about it?” Shouto asked, repeating what Midoriya always said to him when he was upset or sad.

Midoriya’s shoulders began rising and Shouto leaned back slightly, but kept his gaze trained on Midoriya. “There is something...” Midoriya trailed off. He glanced nervously at Shouto but Shouto knew better than to interrupt. He stayed silent, listening as the birds flew overhead and a slight breeze blew a hiss through the trees. Midoriya took a deep breath and stayed straight ahead as he began to rant.

“I’ve been meaning to tell you this for a long time, well maybe not tell but talk about it. It’s actually why I asked you to come hiking with me because that means something special to me, and you mean something special to me-” Midoriya’s blush increased, covering his cheekbones all the way to his forehead. He wrung his hands together over and over. “I don’t really know how to say it. Iida was just trying to help me out this morning because he knew, actually a lot of people know. B-but don’t feel bad, I wasn’t trying to keep it from you and it’s not something horrible. At least I hope you don’t think that way but anyway-I’ve been meaning to tell you-” Midoriya paused as he turned his head and stared straight into Shouto’s eyes. His mouth hung open, he was still blushing as the slight breeze blew the bangs out of his face. His freckles were illuminated by the touch of the sun and Shouto’s breath caught in his throat. He tried not to let it show as Midoriya’s mouth closed then opened again. “I’ve had a crush on you since freshman year,” he finally admitted.

Midoriya immediately turned away, his hand wringing got more intense and he went on another long winded rant. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you, it was hard to work up the courage and I wasn’t sure how you’d take it or if you ever even felt the same-I mean probably not bu-”

“I know,” Shouto said matter of factly.

Midoriya stopped talking mid sentence. He stared into middle distance before slowly turning a disbelieving face towards Shouto. “You know?” he asked, lips hanging open like a whisper in the wind.

Shouto nodded. “It took me a while to realize it myself. At first I thought of you as a close friend, but then it somehow became more than that. Being around you made me feel like myself, it made me feel like I was home and I didn’t know how to express that. Eventually though I figured out that you felt the same and I figured that meant you knew how I felt too.”

Midoriya’s face twisted somewhere on the way to confusion and disbelief. His brows kneaded into each other and his frown turned to the side in a silent ‘hah?’ Two seconds later Midoriya shook his head and lifted a leg onto the bench so he could face Shouto fully.

“Wait-” he raised his voice, seemingly not caring about the couple that were still on the other side of the outlook. “You *knew*.”

Shouto nodded and asked, “I thought you knew that I knew?”

Midoriya shook his head again, blubbering. “No! I-” Midoriya threw his hands to the bench, looking discombobulated now. “How would I have known?” he all but shouted. Shouto shrugged and looked away under the pressure. “So all this time...”

Midoriya began saying then he gasped and suddenly his blush was back. Shouto almost wished he could soothe it away, he usually found Midoriya's embarrassment cute but now he felt bad. "You...feel the same?"

Shouto nodded again, slowly this time because now he was confused. How could Midoriya have not known that? Shouto never tried to hide it. In fact he thought Midoriya could tell the way Shouto acts around him versus around others, he had always been extremely observant. Maybe Shouto had been too subtle. He wasn't good at these kinds of things.

"For how long?" Midoriya asked, his voice barely above a whisper. He was looking up at Shouto through his long eyelashes, green bangs just barely grazing the tip of his eyebrows. The sun was still cupping the round skin of his left cheek and every freckle that showed up in its spotlight seemed like a miracle.

Suddenly, Shouto forgot what Midoriya had been saying, only that Midoriya was waiting for a response. "Uhm-" Shouto began. This time it was his turn to blush. He could feel his ears turn beat red and a heat travelled down his neck straight to his palms until he was wiping them uselessly on his pants.

Midoriya's gaze went from his heterochromatic eyes to the tips of his ears and then to his sweaty hands. A flash of realization crossed his face and he raised his eyebrows. "Oh-" he said. "So this whole time what did you think we were?"

Shouto paused. Could he really answer that? He knew what he felt, but he wasn't sure how that translated into words. He had hoped it was obvious to Midoriya but clearly it hadn't been. Shouto spent a long moment in thought. Midoriya made him feel safe; he smiled anytime Midoriya's name lit up his phone screen; just the thought of Midoriya could put a floating sensation in his head so intense he would forget what he was doing.

Instead of answering, Shouto put a hand on Midoriya's. "I like holding your hand. I like your freckles and your smile. I'm happy when you text me. I'm happy when you're around. I guess...I never called that anything. I just called that 'you'."

Midoriya adopted an expression Shouto had never seen on him before. His eyebrows did a strange jump up and down his forehead and his eyes twitched, but then Shouto realized they were just tearing up. His bottom lip pouted and he opened his mouth to speak.

Shouto searched his emerald eyes for an idea of what Midoriya was going to say next, but emotions flashed through him like a whirlwind, one never stayed present for a moment before being whisked away and replaced by something else.

"Does that mean..." Midoriya began staring down at their intertwined hands. "I can call you my boyfriend?" He looked up at Shouto, hope shining in his eyes. Shouto's heart skipped a beat and he couldn't stop the smile that prickled at the corners of his lips.

"I'd like that," he said.

Midoriya's smile outdid the sun. He leaned forward and grabbed Shouto's cheek with a still shaky hand, bringing them together. Shouto's eyes closed instinctually and he could feel Midoriya's breath on his chin.

He fluttered his eyelids until Midoriya's freckles were the only thing he could see, his breath the only thing Shouto could taste. Then Shouto closed the gap between them. The flavor of Midoriya's lips was alarming, yet not off putting. He still had a bit of morning breath that was overtaken by the rice he'd eaten and now all Shouto could think about was how natural it felt to be kissing him.

It felt, to Shouto at least, as if his life would never have led anywhere else except this moment. Everything that he had endured, everything that he had become, it was all so he could share this moment with Midoriya. Much of who he had become was because of Midoriya. Every scar he'd ever earned, even the ones he was forced to bear, every feeling of rejection from his father and then towards his father, it was all getting him ready to be opened up. To be loved. Shouto was astounded by how happy he was at that realization.

Shouto lifted his hand to where Midoriya's was on his cheek, his skin was scarred and cold but his touch was gentle. Midoriya's lips pressed so softly against Shouto's they were ghosts. Shouto pushed forward, and Midoriya's fingers slightly tightened in his hair as the kiss deepened.

Shouto pulled apart too soon for his liking but he was afraid he could've gotten lost in Midoriya and they were in a public place. As soon as Shouto got a full view of Midoriya's face again he was hit with a new wave of emotion. Midoriya's smile was why he felt this way. Midroiya's kindness was why he wanted this. Midoriya was why he felt love.

A child's giggle rang out in the suffocating summer night air. They

sounded like birdsong to Izuku's ears, high pitched and belly rumbling. "Do that one," Takashi said, his tiny chubby finger pointing to a spot in the sky.

Shouto squinted, a peaceful smile on his face. "Hmm..." He was laying down on the grass with them, hands behind his head. "Looks like a duck riding a bear-OH and he's wearing a propeller hat," he said.

Takashi giggled again. His hands fell to his stomach as he rolled between them, lost in the moment. "That's too-too silly to be a com-constarason." Takashi said, trying hard to enunciate the word he had heard a thousand times but couldn't quite grasp. His face contorted as he tried to sound it out. When he failed he turned to Izuku, pouting.

"Constellation," Izuku said. He reached over to brush Takashi's black bangs out of his face.

"Shi," Shouto said softly and Takashi turned to him. "Wanna see something cool?" He had that smirk on his face, the one that meant he was enjoying himself just as much as Takashi was. Izuku prided himself on the fact that he got to see Shouto's expressions evolve over the years. When they had first met it was rare for Shouto to smile and if he did, it wasn't that big it wasn't ear to ear like he was now. Izuku's heart skipped two beats thinking about it.

Takashi shot upward and curled his hands into fists. "Yeah!" he said with a bit of a lisp.

Shouto looked up at the night sky and reached toward the stars with one hand. His fingers were icing over even as he reached upwards. He extended his arms as far as it could go, using his quirk to make an icy fog fall over them. He put on a look of concentration as he pretended to pluck a star from the sky with a flash of ice crystals falling around them. Then he sat up and held out a tiny, glistening ice sculpture with a dozen frozen points to Takashi.

If Takashi's eyes grew any wider Izuku feared they would pop right out of his head. He held out chubby hands to gingerly cup the star made of ice.

"I've been meaning to give this to you, your very own star," Shouto said as he placed the star in Takashi's hands.

Takashi couldn't find his words. He breathlessly looked between the star that fell cold in his hands and up at Shouto who watched him with rapt attention. He opened and closed his mouth but all that came out were nonsensical sounds of wonder.

Izuku laughed. "I think he likes it," he said, sitting up as well. Takashi looked at Izuku with amazement and nodded enthusiastically. Izuku could hardly believe this was the same boy they had adopted a month ago. It had only been four months since the villain attack which resulted in the death of Takashi's family.

Izuku and Shouto had been there at the time. The villain used a fire quirk to set an entire apartment complex ablaze and while Shouto was busy trying to put out the flames, Izuku was running in and out of the building carrying civilians...but he didn't save enough of them. He still remembered how Takashi looked, delicate cheeks caked with mud and tears as he stumbled up to Izuku's pant leg and asked where his parents were.

Izuku felt a tear prick the corner of his eye and he turned his gaze up to the stars instead. They stretched across the night sky like two different arms of the galaxy. Takashi and Shouto's voices carried into the wind as it blew Izuku's bangs out of his face. A sea of stars expanded, glistened and sparkled. They were lucky the sky was so clear tonight, Izuku could see a white stretch of the sky that blended into midnight blue, stars bursted out of it like a tear in the fabric of the atmosphere giving them a glimpse into a glittering world.

Izuku could feel the moisture in the air gather around their blanket, as it crept onto each blade of grass underneath. The cold dampness hadn't touched them yet, but Izuku could feel the humidity like a musky sweater.

"I'm gon' keep it forever!" Takashi exclaimed. Shouto laughed, a pleasant sound with deep trills that sent goosebumps up Izuku's arms and legs.

"You'll have to be careful," Shouto was saying. Izuku closed his eyes to focus on the sound, on the feeling. He always found it easier to relax into a moment if his eyes were closed. Sometimes he saw too much and he just wanted to hear, to feel, to know the things around him.

A cool breeze blew the scent of the ocean close to their suburban neighborhood, and Shouto's voice was deeper now than it had ever been. It made Izuku feel safe, protected, like Shouto was a steady rock in the storm of their lives as heroes.

"This star is as icy as the moon," Shouto went on. There was some shuffling on their blanket and Izuku could imagine how Shouto was

moving his fingers around the star and shifting his position while Takashi sat stock still, entranced by the sparkling white wonder in his hands. How happy Izuku was they had been able to adopt Takashi he couldn't say, but he felt as if that happiness would never go away. "I can help keep it cool but you'll have to find a freezer to preserve it in."

Takashi made an "ohh" noise. Izuku could hear the way his mouth opened as he sucked in a big breath. "Do you think Ms. Hatsume can make one of glass? I al-always want to see this star...and it'll make me think of you, Daddy."

Izuku's eyes shot open. Takashi hadn't taken to calling them Dad and Papa yet. They had spoken to him about it, but he had only pouted and rubbed his hands on his pants, saying nothing. They didn't pry after that and they certainly didn't expect him to call them anything. Shouto's eyes popped open, all emotion dropped from his face.

Izuku sat up and Shouto's eyes flicked to him next. It was hard to see with only the dim moonlight around them but there were pinpricks of tears at the corners of his eyes. As quickly as Izuku had seen them, Shouto blinked and they were gone. He grinned down at their son and cupped Takashi's cheek, his large thumb running over Takashi's delicate seven year old ear.

"I'm sure Ms. Hatsume will do her best," Shouto said, but Izuku could hear the way his words were wavering. Takashi giggled again as he returned his attention to the star in his hands. He squinted at it for a while then thrust it back to Shouto.

"I'm sure Ms. Hatsume will do her best," Shouto said, but Izuku could hear the way his words were wavering. Takashi giggled again as he returned his attention to the star in his hands. He squinted at it for a while then thrust it back to Shouto.

"Will you-will you keep it safe?" Takashi asked. He wasn't looking at Shouto, eyes dead set on a spot in Shouto's chest, mouth pouting and fingers twitching.

Shouto gently picked the star up by its points. He put a hand on Takashi's head to ruffle his hair a bit and said, "Of course."

Izuku put a hand on Takashi's shoulder then. "We should head in. It's well past your bedtime already."

Takashi spun around to face Izuku. "'M not tir-" he was about to say but Takashi's mouth opened wide and a yawn interrupted him.

Izuku chuckled. "Sure you're not. C'mon I'll carry you." Takashi held out his arms for Izuku to pick him up. His head immediately fell over Izuku's shoulder as his legs wrapped around his torso as his arms went limp by Izuku's neck.

Izuku stood up but before he went to walk inside he looked down at Shouto who was staring at the blanket still. It took a moment, but when Izuku didn't move Shouto looked up at him.

He mouthed out the words, 'you okay?' and scrunched his eyebrows together. Shouto went back to smiling as he turned his head and wiped at the corner of his eye.

"Yeah," he said as he stood up. "I'll meet you inside." Shouto began gathering up the items they had left on the blanket. Izuku nodded and waddled through the back door. Takashi was as quiet as the ocean breeze.

He kicked open the door to Takashi's room, they hadn't had time to decorate much since Takashi came to live with them so most of his room was bare, save for a few All Might posters Izuku had handed down to him in his attempts to get Takashi to trust in heroes. It had been hard enough getting Takashi to warm up to them when heroes were the reason his parents weren't saved. Izuku always thought that there was something about Shouto and his willingness to be there for Takashi as he went from orphanage to orphanage that helped the boy see them differently.

Every new friend, every new social worker, every new home, Takashi had always been welcome to visit them and likewise they paid regular visits to see him and make sure he was being treated okay. Takashi had been too angry and terrified to talk to them at first. Izuku wouldn't have known what to do if Shouto wasn't there to gently offer the boy some food and toys and wait patiently for him to make the next move.

Midoriya sighed as he lowered Takashi down to his bed, holding his head steady. Takashi mumbled something incoherent as his eyes fluttered open. Izuku pulled his comforter up from where it lay crumpled at the bottom of the bed and his eyes closed again. He tucked the fluffy fabric underneath his son, his eyes catching the scar on Takashi's temple from the nightlight.

Izuku brushed his finger against the raised white skin. Now that was the only mark Takashi had from his turmoil, it would likely be a constant reminder of what he went through. Izuku only hoped he could help

Takashi through all the scars that they wouldn't be able to see as well.

Just then Shouto walked silently into the room. He put one hand on Izuku's shoulder as he leaned down to place a kiss to Takashi's forehead. Izuku's palm covered Shouto's and he breathed deeply, watching Takashi's chest rise and fall evenly.

Shouto stayed bent over to cast a glance at Izuku. "I think he'll be okay," Izuku said more as a way to convince himself than anything.

Shouto's hand squeezed his. "We'll be here for him," he said.

Izuku nodded and stood up so they could walk out of the room. Shouto closed the door as quietly as he could. Izuku stopped halfway down the hallway to look back at him. "How are you gonna keep that star from melting?" he asked.

Shouto shrugged his shoulders. "I have no idea."

Izuku chuckled as they continued into the living room. "You could just keep making more," he suggested. Shouto collapsed onto the couch and Izuku sat on the opposite end, curling their feet together.

Shouto shook his head. "That feels like cheating. Maybe if I just stay up keeping it cold we can ask Hatsume to build us something tomorrow."

Izuku blew a raspberry. "That's one of the worst ideas you've had in a while," he said, nudging Shouto's thigh with his big toe. "Let's just keep it in the freezer."

Shouto thought for a moment then nodded his head. "Ah, I forgot about that."

Izuku laughed once more as he flicked on the TV screen. Dull blues and browns filtered over their shadowed faces. A glint from the TV caught on one of the tips of the icy star as Shouto turned it end over end in his hand. His fingers absently pushed a strand of his long hair behind his ears and his bottom lip quirked sideways like it always did when he was studying something.

Izuku didn't have to say anything for Shouto to open up. "He called me Daddy..." Shouto whispered.

Izuku turned the TV volume down and sat closer to Shouto, running his thumbs over Shouto's knees. "I guess he's starting to warm up to us," he said with a smile.

Shouto looked up at Izuku, real tears streaming down his cheeks now. "I-" he said but he hiccuped and covered his mouth with a hand, letting his bangs hide his face.

Izuku tried to lift his chin up with one finger, "Hey now, it's okay."

Shouto chuckled wetly as he wiped at his tears. "I'm a dad," he said and Izuku wasn't sure if he was confused by that statement or proud.

Izuku could try to guess what was going through Shouto's head, but something told him he'd fall short. He knew that one of Shouto's biggest fears was being a father. He knew why and the thought that Shouto could feel that way hurt him. Shouto was brighter, warmer, calmer and kinder than anyone Izuku had ever met. There was nothing else for Shouto to be except a good man, father, and husband.

From the window behind them the light of the moon shone through and illuminated the white part of Shouto's hair until he looked like he was glowing in the dark. Izuku reached down to grab Shouto's hand and slipped it into his. He pulled Shouto forward until his legs relaxed and Shouto was leaning against him.

Shouto took a deep breath and Izuku placed a kiss on the moonshine in his hair. "I'm a dad-" Shouto repeated, still staring at the icy star in his hand.

"And you're going to be amazing," Izuku whispered in his ear. "We both are." Shouto took another deep breath, leaning further into Izuku's warmth. It was getting late and Izuku had a fleeting thought they should probably get to bed themselves, but at this moment the only thing he wanted was to hold Shouto.

Just for this moment in the filtered moonlight he wanted to hold Shouto the same way Shouto had held him years prior as the sun crested over a rocky outcropping. Shouto had told him once that they were meant to be together. That anything Shouto could have done would always lead right back to Izuku, just like the sun will always chase the moon. Their love story was written in the sky, witnessed by deities far beyond their comprehension yet wrapped in their light. Whether it be under the new sun or the full moon Izuku wouldn't be anywhere else except in Shouto's arms.

Credit to @shekmate

Credit to @izunako

Mirador: or, a reunion

Written by: derseroyalty

★ ★ ★

If you were to turn your gaze skyward,
and watch as sunlight breaks through water-filled clouds,
you could find yourself with the honor of watching the Moon fall in love.

(It's in subtle ways, the people whisper on the wind,
of how moonlight kisses the Earth and gives the sweetest of dreams,
hoping his beloved Sun will catch sight of his reflection in the ocean.)

The Moon, as grand as literature portrays, ancient and powerful,
pulls the tide of the Earth, crashing and fighting against gravity
to beg and plea for his lover's embrace,
warmth against his icy bones.

It must be lonely, the mortals think,
to stand on top of the world and be nothing but a mere reflection
of pure sunlight and gentle love, forbidden to even cross paths for a mere moment.

(And yet—
There is something in the air, a hidden, cracked cry,
of golden tears and the weep of someone loved and lost.)

It will take the two of them millennia
to find themselves and each other-
The way their palaces stand tall and dust settles on their respective homes;
and perhaps, as always, what they needed was a push.

An eclipse.

The mortals set their clocks and count the stars as the Moon makes his way across the heavens,
watching the shadows cast their murky presence on the ground.
They stretch unbidden towards the last of gold, fingers outstretched.

When they reunite skyward, a gentle brush of hands
the atmosphere lights up with pure joy and rejoicing.
Whispers of love and tears blur as they intertwine, together again.

With how bright the Sun's light is, it is inevitable that he finds a way for them-
to stay together through the eons and never part again.
A plan set in motion, adament about bending the laws of physics just for love.

Strings pulled, orbits set in constant motion, the concoction of something impossible-
and when the dust settles, set in time and stone, the Sun and Moon are together again;
just as they always should be.

Credit to @shima-draws

Woodstock, VT

Written by: Altered_Karma

★ ★ ★

The porch creaks.

That's the first thing he noticed about the house, the squeakiness and settling of the floor as they cross the threshold into their new home. Shouto pauses just inside, a box of half a lifetime's things held aloft in his hands, and considers the squeakiness of the aged wooden floors.

"That'll need to be looked at later..." He mutters to himself. Jostling the box a bit, he hears the clatter of pots and pans inside, and brings it into the kitchen.

Izuku is already muttering over another box of opened cake tins, hardly noticing when Shouto sets another by his side. Shouto ruffles his curls, again going unnoticed, before returning to the truck for another box.

He lets Izuku handle the kitchen; it's more his territory than Shouto's anyways, but Shouto makes a point of sticking around, lest his husband lose track of time like he usually does. As the day wears on, and the sun's light starts to filter in through their dusty window, the light catches in Izuku's riot of woodland hair in ways Shouto might describe as sacred, were he a poet. Golden halos and flickers of warm light refract off of the top of each curling lock, until the room lights up just as well as if they had no roof at all.

Shouto has to leave then, before he does something to slow down their unpacking progress, like kissing the holy out of Izuku's mouth.

Izuku thinks he finally has the kitchen exactly where he wants it - for now, anyways, he's sure he'll want to revise it ad nauseum until the day they leave this place - so he rises and stretches the soreness out of his limbs.

The sun has long since set, and although hunger gnaws at his stomach, Izuku steps out of the kitchen to go find his husband first.
He finds him in the backyard, turning soil over with a spade, bringing up rich, dark, fertile earth, just ripe for all of the things Shouto has mentioned wanting to one day grow.

Izuku thinks he's looking forward to the strawberries the most, but anything fresh sounds like a blessing.

There's something about him, out in the night, with light from the stars dancing in the dual tones of his hair, that just feels right. Like Shouto was never meant for something so civilized as shelter, when his true home was outside amongst the plants and under the night sky. It's captivating, and Izuku finds himself still and watching long past his stomach's patience with him. And still, Izuku thinks he could stand here all night, in a trance just like this, watching Shouto do just as he pleases with the earth under his feet.

He's a man built to work the soil, Izuku thinks, leaned against the door frame as he watches Shouto work. His shoulders are broad and strong, made for carrying a world's worth of burdens, though Izuku would never let him do so alone. His hands have a firm grip that handles the garden tools just as surely as he does anything: with deliberation and intent that's breath-taking and awe-inspiring all at once. He has this way of planting himself in the soil and working, from left to right, left to right, before moving to his next spot and planting roots there, only to repeat the process over again.

The stars sweep across the sky, trails blazed into the blanket of night, and it must be hours or seconds before Izuku rouses himself to step outside and help. Without a word, he grabs his own spade, and digs in. They turn the earth anew underneath their hands, and prepare it for the tomato saplings Shouto has mentioned wanting to plant, late into the season though it is.

They work, until dawn's warm light creeps over them in the earliest hours of the morning, dinner forgotten with the night.

"Power tools are a fascinating invention that really make life easier." Shouto reminds himself through grit teeth, as the hand drill stalls out for a third time, and the screw grows that little bit more stripped.

"Everything alright, love?" Izuku's voice warbles through the window.

"Peaches and cream." He glares down at the hand drill, and then up at the screw half-embedded in the ceiling. Sighing, he discards the tool, and reaches again for the screwdriver; some elbow grease should help this little problem of his along.

Izuku's head sticks out of the open living room window. "Are you sure? We can trade places."

They're trying to make this house a home, and Shouto just wants to do his part, but he's starting to think this one thing may just have him beat.

"Shouto, dear, let me handle that one? Maybe you can install the light fixtures?"

Izuku is smiling ever so gently behind him, a beacon of forgiving understanding as ever, and it's only because Shouto knows he isn't being judged that he relinquishes the tools with not more than a sigh. "Where should I start?"

He places a hand on Izuku's lower back as he leverages himself up the steps, and once he's settled with a huff, Shouto pats his back once more. *For luck,* he promises himself.

"Hmmm, how about the living room?"

"On it." So he gets set up in the living room, somewhere he can still see Izuku, and gets to work. Only, his eyes keep drifting back to his husband, as they always do. It's clear to him how easy this work is for Izuku. Izuku, who's always been good with his hands, always been the first to join in any labor they find, looks as natural as anything, perched upon that ladder. The way he wields his tools-

"Shouto?" Izuku looks back at him, gaze luminous.

Shouto gets to work, side by side with the light of his life.

Eventually, after a month of circling the house and fixing every little thing that comes to mind, they deem their home finished. Redoing the floors, and the paint, and the siding, all of it took time, but considerably less than they'd anticipated. The porch still creaks whenever anyone so much as looks at it, but at least they won't be tripping on any loose boards.

Instead, they spend their days in leisure, learning their new jobs and what will be expected of them in the coming years. Izuku's acceptance into the fire brigade warrants more working out than renovating a house has permitted him, while Shouto has a great deal of elementary curriculum to learn; he hasn't taught elementary schoolers before, and there's far more behavioral stuff he'll have to keep in mind.

They move from spot to spot around the house as they please, roaming the house and familiarizing themselves with every nook and cranny. Sometimes Shouto will take up the whole kitchen table, or Izuku will hoard the living room floor. Sun spots and shady hideaways are fought for, and there's always some sort of music coming from somewhere in the house.

They end every day in the same way, though.

It becomes a sort of ritual to meet up on the front porch and watch the setting sun. A moment of silent togetherness where they watch the world go dark from the safety of the home they've made their own. That bit of time they share at sunset is something Izuku treasures, and something Shouto can't live without.

And then life begins anew.

Izuku adores his new job, simply adores it. His coworkers are excellent people who do their work without complaint, and who spend their off-hours working around town. Woodstock isn't a particularly large town, hardly more than a village, so everyone's close, and there's always someone open to a friendly helping hand.

It feels like home to Izuku, though he's never lived anywhere like it.

It's the selflessness that really endears him to the town, the way that they don't seem to differentiate between friend and family. All are equal and important, and it doesn't take long for him to start seeing the townsfolk that way. And it's mutual; Izuku is invited to countless family dinners, invited to go shopping, prodded into talking about Shouto and bringing him along.

And they have so many stories to tell him as well. About that year when the winds had been so strong that the earth beneath the trees had seemed to breathe. Or that time a ball of pure lightning had wandered down main street, casual as you please, like it was just another member of the town. There are so many strange sightings that the town itself seems inured to the supernatural.

His favorite stories, though, are the ones he hears from the parents of Shouto's students.

His husband has never wanted kids, never once mentioned it, but it's hard not to watch the way he cherishes their eager little hands and joyous faces and wish, just a little bit, for one of their own. Shouto could use someone to dote on, Izuku thinks, someone who would return every ounce of that love. It's the one thing Izuku can't quite give him, though he can give him the world, and it aches in a way that he doesn't enjoy.

A few months ago, a middle-aged couple of uncommonly handsome features moved into the old abandoned house that had been left for the forest to consume years ago by its inheritors. They're beautiful, this Izuku and Shouto. And for that first little while any time they've stopped into town to buy food or renovation supplies, the townsfolk can't help but stop them for a friendly word, asking how this or that project has gone, whether they're going to do anything with the well that lies on the edge of their property, if they'd like to come to dinner because the missus is still making too much food even though their children left years ago?

Eventually the newness of their arrival wears off, and the two of them begin their jobs and start blending into the fabric of the town, but an element of the fascination never wears off.

There's something so inexplicably charming about the older couple, something secure and confident and safe in their carriages. They quickly become everyone's favorite go-to source of advice, for just about everything, and almost under everyone's noses they've become beloved town leaders. They're asked to make speeches on special days, lead in festival preparations, and are the emergency town babysitters when someone needs a night to themselves.

It's like they've stepped in to fill every role the town never knew it needed filling, and you grow up with their influence all around you.

But all that glitters and is golden must one day return to the embrace of the earth. They spend their golden years in that house, with its creaky floors and rich earth and the hard work of their loving restoration. And when the sun rises after forty years in that house, they greet it from their porch swing.

It's time, they know. Their liberty is ended.

Shouto sits to Izuku's right, Izuku to Shouto's left, and they clasp hands but do not cry. They can still watch over this place, this home they've built, and though they may no longer be able to visit it, there are so many homes and families for them to guard.

When Izuku's heart has fully breached the horizon, and Shouto's has sunk into the sky, from deep within each a glow emanates, and brings them home.

They go with smiles on their faces, because this isn't an end; it's a transition.

The sun calls, across stars and eternity, "And at the end of my days,

When the world is cold and grey,
Will you, dear moon
Stay by my side, be with me?"

"Of course." The moon answers, like there was never any doubt.

You finally decide to bring it up, one night at a potluck, something that's been bothering you for the last couple of days. "So, has anyone seen Shouto and Izuku recently? Normally they'd have been here by now..."

The newly wedded librarian hums thoughtfully. "Come to think of it, I don't believe Shouto has come by to get any books this week."

People around you start to murmur, worry building.

"They are getting on in years."

"When was the last time anyone saw them?"

"Should we go check in on them?"

"Yeah, let's go."

What ends up being half the town - after the various passersby hear what you're all going to do - joins you in your journey out to the old, loving couple's house. All of the lights are off, and you can't see anything moving within the house. But, no windows are broken in, and the door is shut when they arrive.

Several minutes of knocking yield no response, however, and when the mayor tries the handle the door opens with nary a protest.

Your fellow townsfolk look at one another nervously. "Spread out and find them?"

You step into their kitchen, which is as spotless as it ever and everything is put to its rightful place. The only thing out of place is a sealed envelope, obvious and blinding in the center of their granite island.

You hear the others shuffle through the house, but something about the letter is very captivating indeed, and instead of continuing the search, you reach for it to open it up.

"To the person reading this,

We thank you for coming to check in on us, and beg that you don't look or worry when we cannot be found. We had to return from whence we came, and didn't wish to advertise our departure. Take this house, and all the years and love we've put into it, and pass it on. Cherish it. That is all that we ask.

From the stars with love,
Shouto and Izuku."

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Extras

"I had to do it to 'em"

Contributor Oniimely is never allowed on anyone's islands again

Food crime discourse of 2020 nearly deleted the whole server

The pain... it never ends...

@sevedraws' contribution to the meme chat

Dun nuh nuh nuh- ZANANA PHONE

Courtesy of Contributor Inga

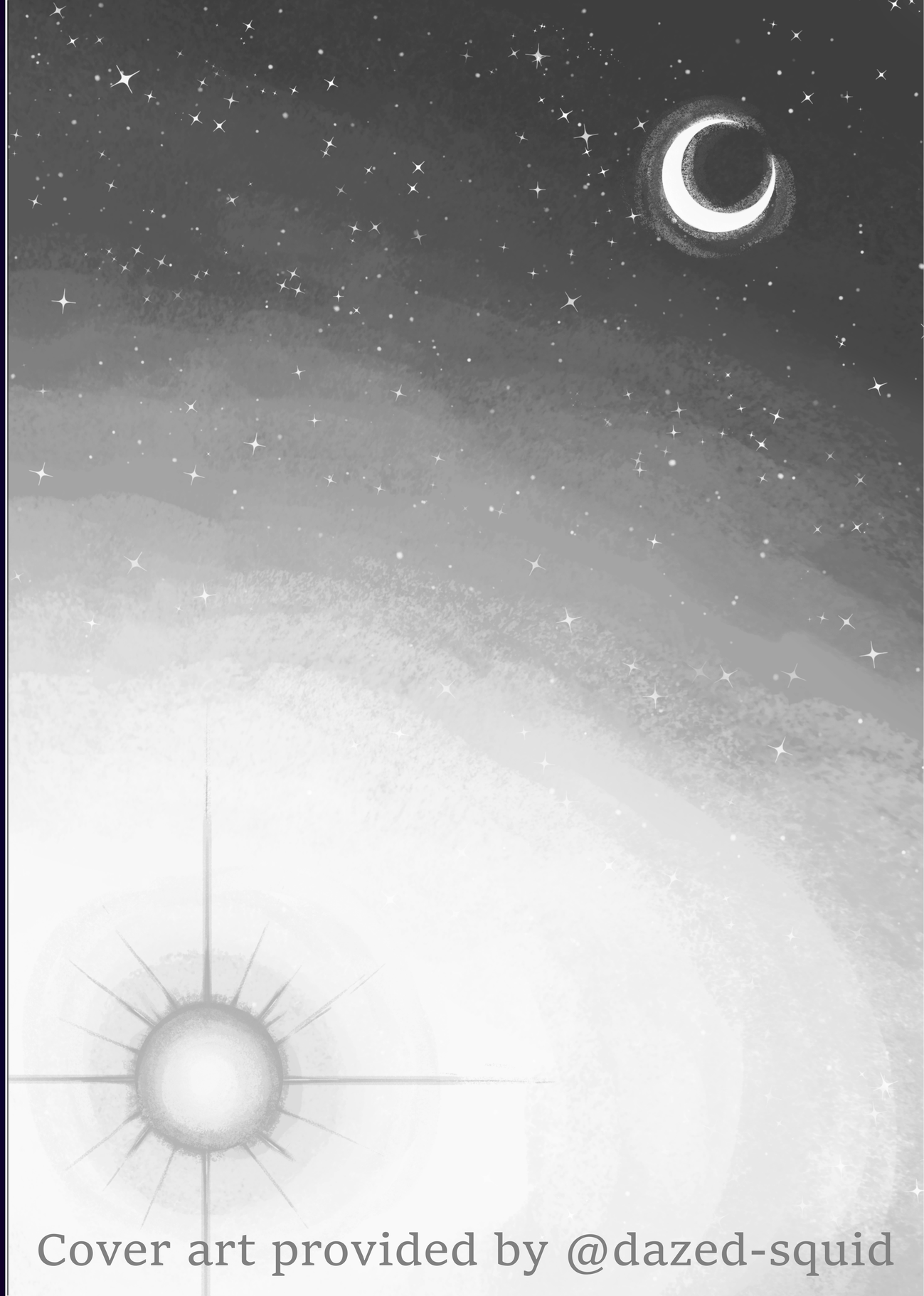
Contributor Zanna likes to fool the chat with her fic premises

Contributor Anna has very specific tastes

To all our shining stars,
keep on twinkling.

★

Written in the Stars
The Official TDDk Sun and Moon Zine



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